NATION

Secretariat turns battle zone over Kerala student's death

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Sensex, Nifty scale new lifetime highs on gains in banking

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SPORTS

Ranji Trophy: Vidarbha defeats MP by 62 runs, to meet Mumbai in final

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PM meets Sandeshkhali women

He tore into TMC saying 'nari shakti' will defeat the party in Bengal

BARASAT, 6 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday tore into TMC, asserting that the "storm of Sandeshkhali" will echo throughout West Bengal. He said 'Nari Shakti' (woman power) would play a pivotal role in decimating the ruling party in the Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a rally in Barasat, the headquarters of North 24 Parganas district where Sandeshkhali is located, Modi said whatever happened with women in the area "is a matter of shame".

Modi met five women who charged suspended TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh and his followers with sexually harassing them.

Meanwhile, CBI on Wednesday got the custody of Sandeshkhali ED official attack case accused Shahjahan the West Bengal CID, following two orders by the Calcutta High Court to do so on two consecutive days.

He described the women who have been protesting against the alleged atrocities as 'Maa Durga'.

He accused the TMC government of prioritising appeasement politics over ensuring the safety of women in the state.

Meanwhile, a few buses in which women of Sandeshkhali were travelling to Modi's rally in West Bengal's Barasat on Wednesday were allegedly stopped at multiple places by the police citing "security protocol".

Narendra Modi during 'Nari Shakti Vandan Abhinandan', at Barasat in West Bengal on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

He highlighted the historical significance of West Bengal as a beacon of women's empowerment, lamenting that under the TMC rule, the state has witnessed "grave atrocities" against women. Alleging that the TMC was shielding criminals, Modi said that despite legal intervention, the state authorities resisted the arrest of those responsible for the Sandeshkhali incidents. "=TMC used all its power to protect the criminals. However, the state government suffered a setback, first from High Court and then from Supreme Court," he said. Meanwhile, reacting to Modi's allegations, senior TMC leader Sushmita Dev claimed that BJP's performance has been dismal in terms of women's security and empowerment.

"You (Modi) speak of women's safety, yet female wrestlers from Haryana were subjected to violence by Delhi Police while protesting at Jantar Mantar. Where was your women's helpline then?" she said.

"Your eloquent speeches are farcical. Your true stance against women is evident,"she said. *—PTI*

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Modi unveils projects worth Rs 12,800 cr in Bihar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday unveiled projects worth Rs 12,800 crore in Bihar's West Champaran district.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the biggest beneficiaries of the projects would be the youths who are looking for employment. He inaugurated a 109-km-long Indian Oil's Muzaffarpur-Motihari LPG pipeline that will provide access to cleaner cooking fuel in the state and also in Nepal.

Modi dedicated to the nation Indian Oil's LPG bottling plant and storage terminal at Motihari.

The new terminal would also act as a strategic supply point for the export of petroleum products to Nepal, besides the eight districts of north Bihar.

Ahead of Modi's visit, Srinagar students asked to carry valid ID cards

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Srinagar on Thursday, the state administration has asked students appearing for exams to carry valid ID cards for verification. Tight security arrangements have been put in place to ensure an incident-free visit. In Srinagar, several schools falling along the route to be taken by Modi have been closed for Wednesday and Thursday while board examinations scheduled to be held on Thursday have been postponed till next month. Students appearing for exams are advised to carry valid ID cards, reach their exam centers by 8.30am, and leave after 3pm to avoid inconvenience. Security personnel have been deployed in large numbers all along the routes to be taken by Modi during his stay in Srinagar.

METRO MARVEL

Top: India's first underwater metro train was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Kolkata on Wednesday; Bangalore Metro Rail Transport Corporation (BMRCL) will perform 37 tests on the driverless train on the Yellow Line, which connects RV Road with Bommasandra via Silk Board. Once the trial run is done, a report will be submitted to the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety **PHOTO: PTI/MOHAMMED ASAD**

NIA announces Rs 10L reward for info on blast suspect

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh for information about the suspected bomber in the 1 March Rameshwaram Café blast case in Bengaluru. The NIA released a sketch of the accused in the 'wanted' poster, and assured that the identity of the informants will be kept confidential. No arrest has been made yet so far while the manhunt is on both by the Central Crime Branch and NIA. *—Salar News*

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Nikki suspends Republican prez campaign

WASHINGTON, 6 MARCH

Indian-American Nikki Haley suspended her presidential campaign on Wednesday after being defeated in 15 states across the US on Super Tuesday, paving the way for a rematch between her rival Donald Trump, and incumbent Joe Biden in the November elections. After Super Tuesday's election results, Trump, 77, had established a lead in the delegate count over his only Republican opponent Haley who denied him a full sweep by winning Vermont.*—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Khelo India medal winners now eligible for government jobs

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Wednesday said that medal winners in all Khelo India competitions will now be eligible for government jobs as per revised criteria. He said the Department of Personnel and Training, in consultation with the Sports Ministry, has Also, individuals who have represented the nation or a state in either international or national events, or demonstrated success in junior national tournaments, will be eligible for employment. *—PTI*

Hyd man duped into fighting Russia war dies

HYDERABAD, 6 MARCH

A man from Hyderabad, who was among the Indians "duped" by agents on the promise of jobs and taken to Russia and forced to work as a "helper" for the Russian Army, has died.

Indian Embassy in Moscow on Wednesday confirmed the death of the man, identified as Mohammed Afsan, adding that they are in touch with the family here.

"We are in touch with the family and Russian authorities. Mission will make efforts to send his mortal remains to India," Indian embassy in Moscow said in a post on 'X'.

When contacted, Afsan's brother Imran said Indian embassy in Moscow informed the family about the 30-year-old's death.

He requested Central government to help them get back his brother's mortal remains.

Mohammed Afsan **PHOTO:**

AIMIM sources said the party's chief Asaduddin Owaisi had contacted Indian embassy in Moscow after Afsan's family approached him in this regard recently. According to Imran, Afsan and two others had reached Russia in November last year as they were promised jobs by the agents.

Earlier, Owaisi had said that family members of some Indian youth, including from Telangana, had met him and informed that their kin was duped by agents on the promise of jobs and taken to Russia, but were allegedly sent to the war front on the Russia-Ukraine border. *—PTI*

'Delhi Chalo' march to restart amid security

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

As protesting farmers are set to resume their march once again to the capital city Delhi, to press for their demands including minimum price guarantees for their crops, the police have increased security at the Punjab and Haryana borders.

Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), the two umbrella bodies that are leading the farmers' protests, on 3 March gave a call to farmers from across the country to reach the national capital today.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher alleged that the central government was not taking the demand of farmers on Minimum support price seriously.

Notably, the farmers have also called for a four-hour countrywide "rail roko" next week in support of their various demands. *—PTI*

Security personnel deployed at Ghazipur border ahead of 'Delhi Chalo' protest on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

K'taka announces 10-day disruption in power bill services

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

The online and offline bill payment of electricity bills will be disrupted in the City for 10 days starting from 10 March to 19 March.

The notice highlights that a software upgrade process will be undertaken by all five Electricity Supply Companies in Karnataka. However, there will not be any disruptions in the power supply.

The disruption affects all urban areas under the Restructured Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Programme in Karnataka. Apart from the bill payments, new service connections, name changes, and tariff changes will be unavailable during this period. During the upgradation of software, disconnection of the installation for non-payment of bills, will not be done.

Electricity bills will be issued as usual. The notice also highlights that the new system might take some time to stabilise. A dedicated IT team will be available 24/7 to address any issues during the downtime. *—Salar News*

Centre sanctions Rs 2,675 cr for K'taka highway

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

A sum of Rs 2,675.31 crore has been sanctioned for the 4-Laning of the Belagavi-Hungund-Raichur Section of National Highway-748A in Bagalkot & Belagavi districts in Karnataka, Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways Nitin Gadkari announced on Wednesday.

This project, covering a total length of 92.4 km, will be executed through the Hybrid Annuity Model, which involves a Public-Private Partnership (PPP). Under PPP mode, the government will provide 40 per cent of the project cost as support during the construction period, while the remaining 60 per cent will be disbursed as annuity payments over the operations period, along with interest to the concessionaire.

Gadkari said that this initiative is a crucial component of the Panaji-Hyderabad economic corridor. The project will connect key industrial centres such as Panaji, famous for fishing, tourism, agriculture, and pharmaceutical industries; Belagavi, known for its production of food grains, sugarcane, cotton, tobacco, oilseed, and milk products; Raichur, recognised for its cultivation of rice, cotton, groundnut, and pulses; and Hyderabad, distinguished for its IT, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, and as a hub for various startups located in Goa, Karnataka, and Telangana states, respectively. The implementation of the hybrid annuity model for building National Highways aims to accelerate road construction in the country. *—Salar News*

Nitin Gadkari **PHOTO: ANI**

K'taka HC quashes board exams for classes 5, 8, 9 & 11

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Karnataka High Court on Wednesday, invalidated notification issued by the School Education Department regarding the conduct of board exams for classes 5, 8, 9, and 11 under the State Board syllabus.

The decision comes in response to the arguments presented by the Registered Unaided Private Schools Association.They argued that such conduct will pressurize the students and will lead to anxiety.

President of the Registered Unaided Private Schools Association, Lokesh Talikatte, said that the Right To Education mandates continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) at the school level for classes 5, 8, and 9, and not board exams. He further noted that CCE involves conducting examinations, and assessment at the school level based on students' learning abilities.

- In March 2022, division bench of the Karnataka High Court had allowed the government to conduct board exams for class 5 and 8 students studying the State board syllabus.

They pointed out that the Karnataka State Examination and Assessment Board had introduced a 'centralized annual examination' for classes 5 and 8 in the previous academic year. Additionally, the government had introduced the same for class 9 and the first Pre-University Course (PUC) through a notification in September 2023. According to the notification, no student shall be detained if they fail in the examinations.

However, for the first PUC examination, the board will conduct a supplementary examination at the college level for students who fail to achieve the passing mark. In March 2022, division bench of the Karnataka High Court had allowed the government to conduct board exams for class 5 and 8 students studying the State board syllabus.

The petitioners moved Supreme Court on 27 March, where their plea was dismissed permitting the State to conduct the examination. *—Salar News*

DESPITE CENTRE'S OBJECTION

SC allows Kerala to borrow Rs 13K cr

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to sanction Rs 13,608 crore to Kerala government in four instalments this quarter.

Court also advised both the Centre and Kerala government to iron out their differences on the other pending issues.

The court observed while it was hearing a suit filed by the Kerala government accusing the Union of India of interfering in the exercise of its "exclusive, autonomous and plenary powers" to regulate the state's finances by imposing a ceiling on borrowing.

"Let all the senior officials who are capable to take decision and who are already involved in decision making sit together and resolve this," a bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan said.

Supreme Court also advised both the Centre and Kerala to iron out their differences on the other pending issues **PHOTOS: PTI**

Kerala government had told the top court on 19 February that a meeting held on 15 February failed to make much headway in resolving the contentious issue.

Appearing for the Kerala government on Wednesday, senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the state was left with no choice but to agitate the issue.

The bench said Sibal had submitted a note at the last hearing where he gave a briefed about an agreement that was probably reached at the 15 February meeting The notes, the bench recalled, said since Kerala has challenged the Centre's power to impose conditions on borrowing, the state's request for additional borrowing can only be considered after it has withdrawn the suit.

With Attorney General R Venkataramani and ASG Venkataraman representing the Centre, the bench said, "You cannot say withdraw the suit. That is a constitutional right under Article 131 (of the Constitution)."

Sibal said there was a need to tackle the issue today as the state needs to borrow a certain amount.

The bench said the dialogue between the Centre and the Kerala government on the issue must not stop. "The dialogue must continue. That is the strength of the relationship between the Union and the state," it said. The bench said it will not fix a next date for hearing the matter and the parties were at liberty to mention it whenever they want. *—PTI*

Kodagu varsity sets record by releasing results in 24 hours

MADIKERI, 6 MARCH

Kodagu University has set a new record by announcing the results of its undergraduate first-semester examinations within 24 hours after the exams concluded. The results were officially announced on 5 March for BCom, BBA, BCA, and BSc degrees, while the results for BA degree programs are set to be declared shortly. The first-semester examinations for first-year undergraduate students of Kodagu University spanned from 25 January to 4 March, culminating with the completion of the BA degree examination. The assessment of the examination papers for BA, BCom, BBA, BCA, and BSc first-year students was completed at an evaluation centre organised at FMKMC College, Madikeri. Subject-wise evaluators from various undergraduate colleges across the district participated in the tasks. Kodagu University used the Integrated University and College Management System to manage the entire process for the examinations. —*Salar News*

Govt to hold mela on solar pumps for farmers

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Karnataka's Department of Energy will hold "Raita Soura Shakti Mela" on 9 March in Bengaluru, which will empower farmers to learn more about solar pumpset . The event will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and will feature informative sessions, interactive exhibits, and product demonstrations showcasing the efficiency and benefits of solar pump sets. Additionally, the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL) is exploring a PPP model for establishing a new GIS substation in Bangalore city to address the anticipated surge in electricity demand due to rapid industrialisation and urban development. —*Salar News*

KPCC general secretary quits over LS ticket

MANDYA, 6 MARCH

Disappointed over not being considered for party ticket to the Mandya constituency in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) General Secretary HN Ravindra has resigned and accused the party of selling Lok Sabha ticket to the highest bidder. Congress is reportedly likely to give a ticket to businessman Chandru for Lok Sabha elections. Ravindra has resigned from both the primary membership of the party and his position as District General Secretary in protest. He criticised district in-charge minister N Chaluvarayaswamy and said Congress leaders are neglecting the needs of the people and considering outsiders for tickets. He highlighted that he was entrusted with the responsibility of KPCC General Secretary, but now feels disillusioned by the atmosphere within the party. —*Salar News*

HC stays handing over of ex-TN CM's gold

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

High Court has stayed the process of handing over gold and diamond jewellery belonging to former Tamil Nadu chief minister late J Jayalalithaa to the neighbouring state government till 26 March. The stay was granted by a single judge bench of Justice Mohammed Nawaz on a plea by Jayalalithaa's niece J Deepa on Tuesday. The valuables were confiscated in a disproportionate assets case against the late AIADMK leader and slated to be handed over to the Tamil Nadu authorities from Wednesday by a special court. The petitioner questioned the 12 July, 2023 special court order contending that Jayalalithaa should be treated as "acquitted" as the apex court had stopped the proceedings against her.

The special court here had said 27 kg of gold and diamond jewellery -- part of the material evidence in the case against Jayalalithaa and others -- would be handed over to the Tamil Nadu government on 6 and 7 March, paving the way for unlocking the value of the assets to mobilise Rs 100 crore fine imposed on her. —*PTI*

₹10L for info on prime suspect in cafe blast

HM says police are inching closer to a breakthrough

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh for information about the suspected bomber in the 1 March Rameshwaram Café blast case in Bengaluru.

The NIA released a sketch of the accused in the 'wanted' poster, and assured that the identity of the informants will be kept confidential.

No arrest has been made yet so far while the manhunt is on both by the Central Crime Branch and NIA. NIA began its probe on Tuesday after the Union Home Ministry directed it to take up the investigation as the State government did not hand over the probe to the central agency.

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the City police found vital clues and are inching closer to a breakthrough.

Following the blast which sent shockwaves to the City, the Café was closed and will only reopen on 8 March. On 1 March, during peak lunch hour, an explosion in Rameshwaram Café injured 10 people. CCTV footage helped the sleuths zero in on a man who left a bag near the cash counter.

The explosion is suspected to have been carried out through an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Soon after the blast, police registered a case under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Explosives Substances Act.

NIA is suspecting that there could be a connection between a low-lying sleeper terror module based in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and the Rameshwaram Café blast.

"Thadiyantavide Nazeer, a life imprisonment convict and Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist, has allegedly radicalised several individuals inside Parappana Agrahara Central Prison in Bengaluru, instigating them to carry out terror attacks in the country," a senior official at an intelligence agency told **Salar News.**

NIA on Tuesday carried out raids at 17 locations in seven states, including State, in connection with its probe into this prison radicalisation case. Mannady and Muthialpet in Chennai and Cuddalore were part of the locations covered in the raid. The premier agency is trying to find if there is any connection between the individuals radicalised by Nazeer and those involved in the blast at Rameshwaram Café. NIA Inspector General Santosh Rastogi is heading the probe into the Rameshwaram Café blast case. —*Salar News*

WANTED
in Rameshwaram Cafe Bomb Blast Case (01.03.2024)
REWARD
Rs.10,00,000/-
ANY INFORMATION LEADING TO HIS ARREST SHALL BE REWARDED
(IDENTITY OF INFORMER WILL BE KEPT SECRET)
Please contact
Tel: 080-29510900, 8904241100, Mail: info.blr.nia@gov.in
Postal Address: SP, National Investigation Agency, #3rd Floor, BSNL Telephone Exchange, 80ft Road, HAL 2nd Stage, Indiranagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka-08.

NIA assured that the identity of the informants will be kept confidential ***PHOTO: SALAR***

CITY GRAPPLES WITH HOAX BOMB THREATS

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

The City has been grappling with a series of hoax bomb threats over the past six months, with the most recent incident occurring on 5 March. Home Minister G Parameshwara expressed the challenges in tracking the source of the threat, as the data is with Google. He mentioned that despite reaching out to Google, no serious response has been received yet, and efforts are underway to cooperate with international agencies to address the issue.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, along with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar received a threatening email sent by an individual named Shahid Khan. The email threatened large-scale explosions targeting buses, trains, temples, hotels, and public areas throughout Karnataka if a demanded amount was not provided.

It mentioned busy locations such as restaurants, temples, buses, or trains, and singled out Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, the state home minister, and the Bengaluru police chief as potential targets. Regarding the Rameshwaram bomb blast case, Minister Parameshwara stated that efforts are being made to arrest the accused soon. —*Salar News*

HOTTER SUMMER

City has already witnessed temperatures exceeding the usual February average by a significant margin ***PHOTO: PTI***

Early heatwaves signal a scorching summer in City

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Bengaluru, once known for its pleasant weather, is experiencing an unusually hot and dry spell, raising concerns about a prolonged and intense summer.

City has already witnessed temperatures exceeding the usual February average by a significant margin, prompting warnings from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) about the possibility of heatwaves in the coming months.

A Prasad, a senior scientist at the IMD's Bengaluru office, told **Salar News,** "We are seeing a clear rise in temperatures year-on-year, which is a sign of global warming. The average temperature in February this year touched the temperature of 34.5 degrees Celsius, which is nearly 5.5 degrees Celsius higher than the normal for this month. Last year the temperatures touched only 29 degree Celsius, which is the normal temperature for Bengaluru."This early surge in temperature has sparked worries among elderly people and children. Heatwaves can cause heat exhaustion, dehydration, and even heatstroke, posing significant health risks."The upcoming summer might be harsher than last year, this aligns with the global trend of rising temperatures, with 2023 recording the second-warmest March in 174 years." warned Prasad. The scorching temperatures are also exacerbating the existing water crisis in City.

He further said the potential for heat waves, particularly in coastal and northern Karnataka, adds another layer of concern. —*Salar News*

DKS: Oppn leaders will join Cong

HUBBALLI, 6 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar claimed on Wednesday several leaders from Opposition parties will be joining the ruling Congress in the coming days, and that he does not want to divulge the "secret" now.

He also did not rule out the possibility of "rebel" BJP MLAs ST Somashekar and Arabail Shivaram Hebbar joining Congress.

DK Shivakumar ***PHOTO: PTI***

Hebbar, MLA from Yellapur, did not turn up for the voting despite a party whip, citing health grounds, while Yeshwanthpur MLA Somashekhar cross-voted in favour of Congress in the name of "conscience", during the polls to four seats of Rajya Sabha from Karnataka on 27 February, in an embarrassment to BJP.They were earlier in the Congress. They were among 17 Congress-JD(S) legislators, who had quit from their parties, which ultimately led to the collapse of the then coalition government in July, 2019. —*PTI*

Drought-hit Mandya farmers face losses

According to the farmers, the sugarcane crops are wilting away, posing a grave threat to their livelihoods ***PHOTO: SALAR***

MANDYA, 6 MARCH

The sugarcane farmers of Mandya district are experiencing significant losses as drought conditions persist and Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS) reservoir fails to supply water to the canals.

According to the farmers, the sugarcane crops are wilting away, posing a grave threat to their livelihoods. Approximately 25,000 hectares of sugarcane farms that depend on canal water may suffer a potential loss of around Rs 200 crore. The KRS reservoir, with a current water level of 89 feet and 7.5 TMC of water, is unable to meet the irrigation needs of the region.

The diversion of water from Visvesvaraya canal further compounds the challenges, especially during summer. Raghuram, Superintendent Engineer at Cauvery Irrigation Corporation, emphasised how crucial rainfall is for both agricultural and urban water needs.

Agricultural authorities have announced measures in which farmers will get 25 per cent subsidy for installing motor, pump and cable for tube wells, coupled with incentives for adopting solar power. Ashok, Joint Director of Agriculture, urged farmers to take the advantage of schemes. —*Salar News*

PRO-PAKISTAN SLOGAN ROW

BJP misleading public with private FSL report, says CM

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah accused BJP of misleading the public with the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) report carried out by a private agency on the alleged audio recording of pro-Pakistan slogan shouters in Vidhana Soudha.

Speaking to reporters in Sirsi of Uttara Kannada on Wednesday, he said the report will not be accepted by the State, and will go by the official FSL report that will be submitted by its own police department.

BJP posted pictures of Congress leaders with Mohammad Shafi Nasipudi--an arrested accused in the pro-Pakistan slogan case—on social media. They alleged that Congress formed a committee of anti-nationals, including those who raised pro-Pakistan slogans.

Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar addressed the ongoing attacks by BJP, asserting, "During our government, the investigation was initiated. However, the BJP did not investigate the incident of pro-Pakistan slogan raising during its tenure."

He questioned why the BJP government did not arrest its workers when they raised pro-Pakistan slogans, emphasising that the matter is now under investigation following a police complaint filed by a local MLA. —*Salar News*

Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: PTI***

CONG LS POLL LIST TO BE OUT IN 2-3 DAYS: CM

Karwar/Hubballi, 6 March

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said Congress' list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the State would be announced in two to three days. He said there is no "major controversy" concerning their selection. He said the nominees will be finalised based on the opinion of the party's local leaders. Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress President DK Shivakumar said in Hubballi that the list would be finalised after Thursday's meeting under the leadership of AICC President M Mallikarjun Kharge. —*PTI*

No direction for trial blast at Baby Betta

MANDYA, 6 MARCH

In a surprising turn of events, the anticipated trial blast in Baby betta of Pandavapur taluk, Mandya district, as directed by the High Court, has been shrouded in confusion.

Earlier in July 2022, experts arrived at the Krishna Raja Sagar Dam (KRS) to carry out the trial blasts at Baby Betta and surrounding areas.

Contrary to earlier announcements, it has come to light that there is no specific order from the court regarding the blast. This revelation has sparked speculation and raised questions about the authenticity of the purported order and the motives behind the decision to proceed with the blast.

The District Administration, along with elected representatives, had previously asserted the existence of a High Court order mandating the trial blast. The State government also decided to conduct a trial blast from 4 to 7 March. —*Salar News*

COP SAVES CHILD FROM DROWNING

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

A 2.5-year-old boy who fell into a 10-feet water sump tank at the BEL Layout at Byadarahalli was rescued by a City police officer.

Sub-inspector Nagraj was on his way to work when he noticed the crowd near the sump. The boy was taken to a nearby hospital where his condition is said to be stable. A video of the child being pulled to safety went viral on social media. The video shows the residents clapping and cheering for Nagraj. In the video, people were seen addressing the cop as a god. —*Salar News*

Nagraj ***PHOTO: SALAR***

CCITR, Infosys extend MOU

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

CCITR's objective is to enhance the capacity of various stakeholders ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

The Centre for Cyber Crime Investigation Training and Research (CCITR) has extended the Memorandum of Understanding for the next five years under the public-private partnership project between the State government and Infosys Foundation to equip the police personnel to tackle cyber crime cases.

While attending Cyber Crime Investigation Summit 2024 on Wednesday, Home Minister G Parameshwara told reporters, "State aims to find solutions for the cross border cyber attacks and very soon the state will implement the cybercrime policy 2024 which will help us to come under one agreement to access and coordinate with the other states to tackle problems."

These training facilities have been provided at CID Headquarters, Bengaluru for the last 12 years. Parameshwara said, "Currently the department is not equipped to deal with the cases which go out of geographical limit."CCITR was established in 2007 as South India's first Cybercrime & Cyber Forensics training facility. Since its inception, CCITR has trained over 33,000 police personnel and defence personnel, both within the state and beyond.

CCITR's objective is to enhance the capacity of various stakeholders, including police, prosecution, judiciary, and other departments, in handling technology-related investigations.

Three college students get 70k award price

Over 1,000 students from across the State participated in the event, with three teams awarded a cash prize of 70,000 each for solving sample cybercrime cases within 24 hours. Two winning teams hailed from the City, while one team represented Davangere Engineering College. —*Salar News*

KANNADA CULTURE

Students to read Kambar, Karnad's writings

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Writings of Jnanpith awardees Chandrashekhar Kambar and Girish Karnad, and Padma Shri award winner Devanuru Mahadeva have been introduced in the revised Kannada language school textbooks. This is as per the guidelines of National Curriculum Framework-2005 by the Textbook Revision Committee (TRC) of Karnataka Textbook Society.

The TRC said it has revised the entire chapter of 'Namma Hemmeya Rajya Karnataka' in the sixth standard Kannada book with more details and pictures.

"Details and photographs of Chandrashekhar Kambar, Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar, HL Nage Gowda, Siddalingaiah, Sri Siddeshwara Swami, Shantaveri Gopala Gowda and Gavimatha of Koppal have also been included," TRC said in a statement.

The ancient dynasties of South India and royal families of North India have been discussed in the book. Also, a chapter on Vedic culture and the rise of new religions have been included in the 6th standard book.

In the same book, rights of the sexual minorities are included in the chapter on equality.

The title of a chapter 'religion' in 7th standard Kannada book has been changed to 'Dharmagalu' and 'Vishwaguru Basaveshwara' has been recorded in the same book as 'Cultural Leader' (Samskrutika Nayaka).

In the 8th standard Kannada textbook, the title of a chapter 'Jain and Buddhist sects' has been changed to 'Jain and Buddhist religions'.

In 9th standard textbook, the 15th-16th Century AD saint-poet Kanaka Dasa and his contemporary Purandara Dasa along with 19th Century AD saint-poet Santa Shishunala Sharifa have been included in the chapter titled 'Bhakti Pantha' (Devotional Path).

Kambar's 'Seeme', Karnad's 'Adhikara', along with Devidasa's Chakragrahana, M Mariappa Bhat's 'Namma Bhashe', AN Murthy Rao's 'Vyaghra Geete', Mahadeva's 'Edege Bidda Akshara' and 'Vachanas' of Akka Mahadevi have been included in the textbooks for Class 8 to Class 10.—*PTI*

In the same book, rights of the sexual minorities are included in the chapter on equality ***PHOTO: PTI***

- **This is as per the guidelines of National Curriculum Framework-2005 by the Textbook Revision Committee of Karnataka**

WB cops hand over Shahjahan Sheikh to CBI after court order

He was arrested in a case related to a mob attack on ED officials

KOLKATA, 6 MARCH

The CBI on Wednesday got the custody of Sandeshkhali Enforcement Directorate (ED) official attack case accused Shajahan Sheikh from the West Bengal CID, following two orders by the Calcutta High Court to do so on two consecutive days.

In a fresh directive on Wednesday, the High Court directed the state government to "immediately implement" its Tuesday's judgement to transfer a case on the attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali to the CBI and hand over custody of the main accused Sheikh to the central agency.

A team of CBI officials reached CID headquarters Bhawani Bhawan before 4 pm. But the handover from the state agency took place at 6.48 pm, despite the Calcutta High Court setting a deadline of 4.15 pm.

CBI takes main accused Shahjahan Sheikh (left) to Joka ESI Hospital in Kolkata on Wednesday **PHOTO: ANI**

"Sheikh was handed over to CBI," a CID official said. CID took him to a state-run hospital for a medical check-up before handing him over to the CBI. CBI officials are likely to take him to an ESI Hospital and then to Nizam Palace, the city office of the central investigating agency.

He was arrested in a case related to a mob attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali on 5 January when the central agency had gone to search his premises in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam.

- A team of CBI officials reached CID headquarters Bhawani Bhawan before 4 pm. But the handover from the state agency took place at 6.48 pm

"This is shameful. Despite the Calcutta high court setting a 4.15 deadline, Sheikh was handed over more than two hours. This only proves that the TMC government has the least regard for the judiciary," BJP MLA Shankar Ghosh said. CBI on Tuesday failed to get the custody of suspended TMC leader Sheikh from the West Bengal CID even after waiting for more than two hours.

CID said the leader of Sandeshkhali was not handed over to the central agency as the state government had moved the Supreme Court against an order of the Calcutta High Court.

But an apex court bench refused an urgent listing of the plea and asked the state's counsel to mention the matter before the Registrar General.

Sheikh, one of the key accused in cases of atrocities against women in Sandeshkhali, was arrested last Thursday by the West Bengal police. The case was later taken over to the West Bengal CID. Appearing for ED, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju submitted that the state was trying to deny custody of Sheikh to CBI, claiming that the purpose of the transfer of probe to the central agency was getting frustrated. He submitted that 15 days is the maximum custody period of an accused in a case and already the state has Sheikh's custody for about a week. *—PTI*

Mamata hikes salaries of ASHA, Anganwadi workers

KOLKATA, 6 MARCH

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday announced that her government will hike the remunerations of ASHA and Anganwadi workers ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.In a video posted on Facebook, Banerjee said the remunerations of ASHA and Anganwadi workers will be raised by Rs 750 per month. They used to get Rs 8,250 per month, and with this hike, it will be Rs 9,000. The remuneration of Anganwadi helpers will be hiked by Rs 500 per month, Banerjee said. They used to get Rs 6,000 per month previously, and with this raise, it will increase to Rs 6,500.The hikes will come into effect on 1 April, Mamta added.The announcements were made amid much anticipation after Banerjee posted on Facebook on Tuesday night that she had something special to share at 10am on Wednesday.The development came amid Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state to inaugurate a slew of metro projects along with other engagements. *—PTI*

Rajasthan CM tests positive for Covid-19

JAIPUR, 6 MARCH

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Wednesday said he has tested positive for Covid-19. He said in a post on X that due to a health issue, he got a health test done, which showed he was Covid positive. "I am in self-isolation and am completely following the advice of doctors and will participate in all the upcoming programmes through the virtual medium," Sharma said. *—PTI*

Fomer TMC leader Tapas Roy joins BJP

KOLKATA, 6 MARCH

Former Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Tapas Roy, who had quit West Bengal's ruling party two days ago, joined BJP on Wednesday Roy had resigned as TMC MLA on Monday, citing disillusionment with the party leadership. "I have joined BJP today, as I want to fight against the misrule and atrocities of TMC," he said, after being handed over the party flag from BJP state President SukantaMajumdar and SuvenduAdhikari here. TMC, however, said Roy has abandoned his principles and ideologies in his quest for personal gains. "The people of Bengal would never forgive traitors like Tapas Roy, who quit the party for vested interests," TMC leader Santanu Sen asserted. Roy, a five-time MLA, had accused the TMC and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of "deserting him during trying circumstances", expressing his frustration over the party's silence when his residence was raided by the ED on 12 January over alleged irregularities in municipal recruitment. *—PTI*

MP Rana receives death threat on WhatsApp, FIR filed

AMRAVATI, 6 MARCH

An FIR was registered against unidentified persons for allegedly threatening to kill Amravati MP Navneet Rana by sending an audio message on her WhatsApp number.The sender of the message also used objectionable words against the Independent MP, as per the FIR."Rana received the threat message on her phone number on 3 March following which her assistant complained with the police. FIR was registered on Tuesday," police said. The audio clip also contained objectionable words against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Amit Shah, and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.Police have registered a case under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on the charges of molestation, stalking, and criminal intimidation on the complaint lodged by Rana's PA.An actor-turned-politician, NavneetRana, wrested the Amravati Lok Sabha seat from Shiv Sena leader AnandraoAdsul in 2019. *—PTI*

Seat-sharing formula: Shah meets Shinde, Ajit

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday held a meeting with Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, amid reports that a seat-sharing formula for the 48 Lok Sabha seats in the state was the main agenda of the talks.

Shah's visit to the state, days before announcement of the schedule for Lok Sabha polls, comes at a time when BJP-led ruling alliance partners Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) and Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) have been vocal about allocation of more seats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly declared in the last few days that BJP will cross 370-plus seats and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will get 400-plus seats in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections.

Though there is no clarity yet on the quantum of seats each party in the Mahayuti (grand alliance) will contest, sources said BJP is asserting its right over 30 seats, adding that Shinde faction would contest more seats than the Ajit Pawar-led party. *—PTI*

I wished for justice, but only got humiliation: Cong MLA in HP

SHIMLA, 6 MARCH

Running from Sujanpur to Shimla and from Shimla to Delhi with folded hands for the fulfilment of the promises made by Congress in the run-up to the last Assembly polls in Himachal Pradesh did not yield results and "I wished for justice, but got only humiliation," rebel party MLA Rajinder Rana has said.

In a Facebook post addressed to the people of the hill state on Tuesday, Rana, who caused a major upset by defeating former chief minister PK Dhumal of BJP in the 2017 Assembly polls, said despite several efforts, he was neither heard by Congress leadership in Shimla nor Delhi.

Rajinder Rana **PHOTO: PTI**

Six rebels Congress MLAs, including Rana, who were disqualified for defying the party whip asking them to be present in the Assembly and vote in favour of the state government during cut motions and the budget, moved the Supreme Court on Tuesday against their disqualification. These legislators had voted for BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan in the recently concluded Rajya Sabha polls.

Congress MLA said in the end, he was left with two options -- to enjoy the pleasures of power by joining the kitchen cabinet of Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu or sound the bugle of rebellion. He added that "Devbhoomi" has taught him since his childhood that if a rebellion is necessary for the truth, one must never hesitate, and "I adorned the teachings, values, and culture of Devbhoomi ... and sounded the bugle of rebellion". *—PTI*

Pawar moves HC over PIL against Lavasa

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

NCP founder Sharad Pawar has moved Bombay High Court against a PIL filed by an advocate seeking a CBI probe against him, his daughter Supriya Sule, and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar over alleged illegal permissions given to construct a private hill station at Lavasa in Pune district.

NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) Chief, in his intervening application filed through advocate Joel Carlos, sought to be impleaded as a respondent in the public interest litigation (PIL) so that he could put forth his arguments against the petition.

Lawyer NanasahebJadhav had last year filed the PIL seeking a direction to CBI to register a case against the three and some officials of the state government over the alleged irregularities.

Senior counsel Aspi Chinoy, appearing for Sharad Pawar, on Wednesday told the court that similar and identical allegations have been made by the petitioner Jadhav time and again.

Sharad Pawar **PHOTO: PTI**

The application said Pawar needs to be impleaded as a respondent to ensure fair disposal of the PIL as there are several allegations levelled against the senior political leader.

It added that no prejudice or hardship would be caused to Jadhav if Pawar is added as a respondent in the PIL, but grave injustice would be caused to Pawar if he is not permitted to intervene in the matter.

The bench directed Jadhav to file his affidavit in response to Pawar's application within two weeks and said it would hear the matter further after four weeks. *—PTI*

Another Guj Cong MLA resigns; set to join BJP

AHMEDABAD, 6 MARCH

Congress MLA Arvind Ladani on Wednesday resigned from the membership of the Gujarat Assembly, becoming the fourth legislator of Opposition party to quit in the last three months, and is set to join BJP.

A first-time MLA from Manavadar seat in Junagadh district, Ladani submitted his resignation to Assembly Speaker Shankar Chaudhary at the latter's official residence in Gandhinagar.

Arvind Ladani **PHOTO: PTI**

Chaudhary has accepted Ladani's resignation, as per the Speaker's office.

Ladani had defeated BJP candidate Jawahar Chavda, a Congress turncoat, in the 2022 Assembly polls by a slender margin of 3,400 votes.

Before Ladani, three MLAs of Congress namely Chirag Patel, CJ Chavda, and veteran ArjunModhwadia, had resigned as members of the House and joined BJP.

Congress has been witnessing a steady decline in Gujarat in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. *—PTI*

Ex-MP Singh gets 7-year jail in 2020 abduction & extortion case

JAUNPUR, 6 MARCH

Former MP Dhananjay Singh and his associate Santosh Vikram Singh were handed seven years of imprisonment by an MP-MLA court here in a 2020 kidnapping and extortion case.

Presently with the Janata Dal (United), Singh was reportedly preparing to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections from Jaunpur. But the conviction now makes him ineligible under the Representation of the People Act to contest election.

Additional Sessions Judge Sharad Kumar Tripathi, who held Singh and his associate Santosh guilty in the case of kidnapping of Namami Gange project manager Abhinav Singhal on Tuesday, also imposed a fine of Rs 75,000 on each of them, District Government Counsel (Criminal) Satish Pandey said.

Pandey said that Muzaffarnagar resident Singhal had filed a case against Singh and his partner Santosh on 10 May, 2020, at Line Bazar police station under IPC sections of kidnapping, extortion, conspiracy and others.

Former MP Dhananjay Singh **PHOTO: X**

According to the FIR, Santosh, along with two associates, kidnapped Singhal and took him to the residence of Singh where the former MP came with a pistol and abused him and pressured him to supply low quality material. On refusal, he threatened Singhal and demanded extortion, it was alleged.

Singh was arrested in this case and later got bail from the Allahabad High Court.

District government counsel said that on the basis of CCTV footage, call details record, WhatsApp messages and statements of witnesses, the crime was proved against the accused. *—PTI*

BIHAR RALLY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being garlanded during the inauguration ceremony of various development projects in Bihar **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi terms Lalu and his family 'biggest offenders'

BETTIAH, 6 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday called RJD president Lalu Prasad and his family "the biggest offenders of Bihar", accusing them of ushering in jungle raj in the state during its more than a decade-long rule.

Addressing a rally in Bettiah, West Champaran district, Modi alleged that the youths of Bihar had been compelled to migrate in large numbers due to the misrule of RJD-Congress combine. He asserted that it was only after NDA took charge that the state began to witness improvements.

"The family responsible for jungle raj...they are biggest offenders (sabse bade gunahgar) of Bihar. Their misrule imperiled the future of an entire generation. Youths were forced to migrate to other parts of the country, while only one family prospered", said Modi.

Modi also reacted to Prasad's barb that his attacks on dynastic politics stemmed from his having "no family" and said, "had people like Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Karpoori Thakur been alive, these people would have attacked them, too, for not promoting their own families".

"Their main grouse against me seems to be that I have no family. For me, the entire country is my family. And today the entire nation is saying that it sees itself as Modi Ka Parivar", Modi said.

In an apparent reference to DMK leader A Raja's controversial remarks, Modi said, "West Champaran is the land of Sage Valmiki, where Goddess Sita took shelter and Luv-Kush was born. The people here will not forgive the insults being heaped on Lord Ram by INDI alliance leaders. The people are also taking note as to who is encouraging such attacks on our culture and tradition". *—PTI*

HC dismisses petitions against Udhayanidhi, Babu, Raja

CHENNAI, 6 MARCH

Madras High Court on Wednesday declined to issue a writ of 'quo warranto' on petitions filed by members of a Hindu nationalist outfit against DMK Ministers Udhayanidhi Stalin and PK Sekar Babu and Member of Parliament A Raja, questioning their right to hold office after they made comments allegedly against Sanatana Dharma. The quo warranto petitions questioned under what authority they were holding their official posts. Justice Anita Sumanth disposed of the petitions filed by two Hindu Munnani functionaries and another person, which questioned the authority of the three DMK leaders holding official posts when they had participated in an "anti-Sanatana Dharma meeting" and allegedly delivered speeches against the system of religious practices. T Manohar, who claims to be an office-bearer of Hindu Munnani, and two others filed the present quo-warranto petitions. Dismissing the petitions, the judge however observed that persons holding high posts must act with more responsibility and verify historical events before making statements. *—PTI*

520 METRES IN 45 SECONDS

Modi unveils India's first underwater Metro line in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 6 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated Kolkata Metro's Esplanade-Howrah Maidan section, which passes below the mighty Hooghly River through the country's first underwater transportation tunnel.

He also took a ride on a metro train from Esplanade to Howrah maidan and interacted with school students during the journey passing through the tunnel, which is a testament to the country's engineering capabilities.

He returned to the Esplanade station through the same route, and was accompanied by Leader of Opposition in the state SuvenduAdhikari during the trip.

However, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee did not attend the programme.

The 4.8-km Esplanade-Howrah maidan stretch, which is a part of the East-West Corridor, has been built at a cost of Rs 4,960 crore, officials said.

Modi also inaugurated the 1.25-km-long Taratala-Majherhat section of the Joka-Esplanade line. It has been built at a cost of Rs 520 crore.

Kavi Subhash-Hemanta Mukhopadhyay section of the New Garia-Airport line built at a cost of Rs 1,430-crore was also inaugurated from the function at the Esplanade metro station.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with school children during a metro ride after unveiling India's first underwater metro line in Kolkata **PHOTO: X/ BJP4BENGAL**

These sections will help decongest road traffic and provide seamless, easy and comfortable connectivity, a statement said.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated Kolkata Metro's Esplanade-Howrah Maidan section, which passes below the mighty Hooghly River through the country's first underwater transportation tunnel.

East-West metro corridor, the construction for which commenced on 14 April, 2009, has suffered several delays owing to various issues, including accidents at Bowbazar in central Kolkata.

Metro Railway general manager P Uday Kumar Reddy had earlier said it is targeting June-July this year to start commercial operation on the entire line.

Completion of the project has suffered delays owing to an aquifer burst at Bowbazar on 31 August, 2019, leading to severe ground subsidence and the collapse of a number of buildings there and two more water leakage incidents at the same site in 2022 during tunneling and construction work. *—PTI*

Kerala man dies in accident caused by wild boar

MALAPPURAM, 6 MARCH

A 45-year-old man died after the autorickshaw he was driving overturned, allegedly because a wild boar jumped across it in this district, police said on Wednesday. The incident was reported from the Karakkunnu area under the Edavanna police station limits on Tuesday night.Police said Shaffique's autorickshaw turned turtle when he allegedly swerved to avoid the wild boar that jumped across the road.An injured Shaffique was immediately rushed to a nearby hospital, but he died on the way, police added.*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Twin cylinder blast kills 5 of family in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, 6 MARCH

Five people of a family were killed and four others got injured when two LPG cylinders exploded in a house in the Hata Hazrat Sahab area here, police said on Wednesday.The incident took place Tuesday around 10.30 pm under Kakori Police Station. The blast was preceded by a fire, which was said to have been caused by a short circuit. Nine members of the family were rushed to the Trauma Centre of King George Medical University, where five of them died. The deceased are Mushir, 50, his wife Husn Bano, 45, Raiya, 7, Uma, 4, and Hina, 2, they said. Isha, 17, Lakab, 21, Amjad, 34, and Anam, 18, were hospitalised. District Magistrate Suryapal Gangwar said of the four under care at the hospital, two are critical with 90 per cent burns, while the other two had 40 per cent and 50 per cent burn injuries. Gangwar said he has no such information whether the house was being used to run a cracker factory. *—PTI*

Girl, 6, allegedly raped by boys in UP

BALLIA, 6 MARCH

A six-year-old girl was allegedly raped by two boys in a village in Fefna area here, police said on Wednesday. Additional Superintendent of Police Durga Prasad Tiwari said the incident took place on Monday when the girl was playing with the boys, who took her to secluded place and raped her.The boys are 10 and 12 years old, he said. On complaint of the girl's mother, an FIR was registered against the two under section 376 (rape) of the IPC and POCSO Act.The two were detained and sent to a remand home after being produced in a juvenile court, police said. *—PTI*

Man ends life soon after losing friend to road accident

DHAR, 6 MARCH

A 28-year-old man allegedly hanged himself to death from a tree soon after he lost his close friend in a road accident in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Wednesday.The man, Kanti, hanged himself to death from a tree on Tuesday evening at Nalkheda on Indore-Ahmedabad highway after recording a video statement in which he said he was taking the extreme step as his friend died in an accident when they were going on a motorcycle, they said."Two motorcycles collided on the highway, in which a man identified as Narve Singh,29,died while his friend Kanti survived. Both of them were friends and resided at Phuldanvadi in Jhabua district. They were returning home from Ujjain when the accident occurred," Rajgarh police station in-charge Sanjay Rawat said.Shattered and distraught due to the death of his friend, Kanti committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree near the accident site, he said. The two people on another motorcycle involved in the accident, suffered injuries and are under treatment. *—PTI*

Secretariat turns battle zone over Kerala student's death

Congress is demanding a CBI investigation into the death of the student

T'PURAM, 6 MARCH

Kerala Secretariat's main gate in the heart of the state capital turned into a battle zone on Wednesday as workers of various organisations clashed with the police and protested there against the recent death of a student of the Kerala Veterinary University in Wayanad district.

Workers of Congress party, its youth and women's wings, students unit of the IUML and AAP marched to the secretariat here and laid siege to its gate in front of the MG Road here.

Initially activists of IUML's student wing, Muslim Students Federation (MSF), protested in front of the barricades set up in front of the secretariat and then blocked half of the MG Road in front of it.

Later, they clashed with the police personnel deployed there.

Soon, they were joined by the activists of the Youth Congress and Mahila Congress and AAP workers and the protestors, many of them women, shouted slogans of "go back" at the police.

As per visuals of the multi-organisation protest, police resorted to use of water cannons and lathis a few times to disperse the crowd, but it was not successful.

Police personnel detain Muslim Students Federation activists during their protest demanding a CBI probe into the death of Kerala veterinary student on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Many women were also seen climbing atop the barricades set up in front of the Secretariat's main gate.

The groups are protesting over the death of JS Sidhharth, a student in Government Veterinary College, Pookkode, in Wayanad, who was found hanging inside his college hostel on 18 February.

Former Congress chief and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday demanded a CBI investigation into the death of veterinary student JS Sidharth, alleging that Kerala law enforcement agencies and university authorities are attempting to protect those responsible for it.

In a letter to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Gandhi said the "tragic death" of Sidharthan after "days of gruesome torture" at the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University in Wayanad has "shocked our collective conscience".

The perpetrators are active members of the Students Federation of India (SFI), he alleged.

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan on 1 March suspended the Vice Chancellor of the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Dr MR Saseendranath in connection with the death of a second-year student at the university.

Khan, in the order of suspension order, stated that the report provided by the Saseendranath, clearly demonstrated a severe negligence of duty on his part during the events that led to the death of Sidhharth. *—PTI/ANI*

FOREST OFFICIAL SLAMMED

SC raps ex-min over illegal works at Corbett

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Observing that the "public trust doctrine" has been thrown into the waste bin, Supreme Court pulled up former Uttarakhand minister Harak Singh Rawat and a former divisional forest officer on Wednesday for allowing illegal construction and felling of trees in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR).

An apex court bench headed by Justice BR Gavai said it was amazed at the audacity of Rawat, who was the forest minister in BJP government in 2021 and is now with the Congress, and former divisional forest officer Kishan Chand in giving statutory provisions a total go by.

"Since the matter is pending investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), we do not propose to comment any further on the matter. We have also observed that this cannot be done by two people only. Many other people must have been involved," the bench, also comprising Justices PK Mishra and Sandeep Mehta, said.

Apex court directed CBI which is already probing the case, to file its status report in the matter within three months.

Court's judgment came on a petition filed by environment activist and lawyer Gaurav Bansal alleging destruction of the tiger habitat and a decline in the tiger density in the Lansdowne Forest Division owing to illegal construction in the Pakhro Tiger Safari as well as illicit felling of thousands of trees.

"They (Rawat and Chand) have, in blatant disregard of the law and for commercial purposes, indulged in mass felling of trees to construct buildings on the pretext of promotion of tourism," the bench said, adding that the state cannot run away from the responsibility of restoring the status of the forest.

Central Empowered Committee of Supreme Court had earlier held Rawat and Chand responsible for various illegal activities, including constructions in connection with a tiger safari in 2021, in the Pakhro and Morghatti forest areas of the Kalagarh Forest Division of the CTR.

Enforcement Directorate (ED) had earlier raided the residences of Rawat and Chand in connection with illegal construction in the tiger reserve.

CTR, which is famous for the Royal Bengal Tiger, remains closed for tourists during monsoon and opens in October-November.

—PTI

Police recruitment exam: UP STF arrests 7

MEERUT, 6 MARCH

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Uttar Pradesh Police's Special Task Force (STF) has arrested seven people from Meerut and Delhi for their alleged involvement in the recent police recruitment exam paper leak case, officials said on Wednesday.

The accused are alleged to be members of a gang involved in the question paper leak of the Uttar Pradesh Recruitment and Promotion Board examination on 17 and 18 February, STF said in a statement.

State government had cancelled the exam following allegations of a mass scale paper leak. Some people were arrested earlier this month.

In Meerut, Deepak, Bittu, Praveen, Rohit, Naveen, Sahil, all residents of the district, were arrested from a house in Kanker Kheda Police station on Tuesday night, the officials said.

While Gautam Buddha Nagar-resident Pramod Pathak was arrested from Mukharjee Nagar in Delhi the same night.

Their gang is also allegedly involved in arranging paper-solvers and leaking questions to candidates preparing for competitive exams, STF statement read.

Police said several documents related to the 2024 constable recruitment examination, solved question papers, multiple mobile phones and cash were seized from the accused.

The accused allegedly took anywhere between Rs 8 Lakh to 10 Lakh from the candidates on the promise of leaking the question paper, they said.

STF has lodged two FIRs against the accused at the Kankar Kheda and Sector 39 Police station of Meerut and Gautam Buddha Nagar districts.

—PTI

MODI KA PARIVAR ROW

Posters showing PM with fugitives crop up in Delhi, FIR filed

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The posters carried the caption 'real family of Modi' *PHOTO: X/ @CLYADAVINC*

Delhi Police has registered an FIR in connection with posters carrying a picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with fugitive businessmen Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya that came up in several parts of central Delhi, an officer said on Wednesday.

Posters carried the caption "Modi ka asli pariwar" (real family of Modi) with 'Bhartiya Yuva Congress' written at the bottom.

A senior police officer said a case under Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Property Act has been registered against unknown persons at Tughlak Road Police Station and the posters have been removed.

The case was registered at the complaint of an official from the New Delhi Municipal Council on Tuesday, he said.

Police said the posters did not carry the name of the publisher or the person who put them up.

Modi on Monday said 140 crore Indians are his "family," as he mounted a counter-offensive over Rashtriya Janata Dal's (RJD) Lalu Prasad's "no family" jibe at him.Yadav, while addressing the party's 'Jan Vishwas Maha Rally' in Patna on 3 March had said that Modi just spreads hatred in the name of religion.

"These days he is talking about dynastic politics. You (Modi) don't have a family. You are not even a Hindu. When your mother died, every Hindu, as per tradition, shaves his beard and head. Why did you not shave? You only spread hatred in society," Yadav said.BJP later launcheda "Modi Ka Parivar" campaign on social media.

As several BJP leaders added "Modi Ka Parivar" in their social media bio, the Congress on Tuesday asked the party whether fugitive businessmen Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya were also in this family.

—PTI/ANI

India commissions INS Jatayu

MINICOY, 6 MARCH

Strengthening the operational prowess of the Indian Navy within the strategically vital Lakshadweep Islands, a significant development unfolded on Wednesday -- the commissioning of a naval base at Minicoy, now designated as 'INS Jatayu'.

Naval Detachment INS Jatayu, which will boost operational reach and facilitate the Indian Navy's operational effort towards anti-piracy and anti-narcotics operations in the Western Arabian Sea, was commissioned by Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar.INS Jatayu has been commissioned under the command of Commandant Vrat Baghel.

Addressing the gathering at Minicoy after the commissioning of INS Jatayu, Kumar said the unit was named after the mythical creature in the epic Ramayana who tried to stop the abduction of Sita.

"In the Ramayana, Jatayu was the 'first responder', trying to stop the abduction of Sita ji, even to the peril of his own life, exemplifying service before self. So the naming of this unit as Jatayu is an apt recognition of this spirit of providing security surveillance and selfless service," Kumar said.

He said that the information Jatayu relayed to Lord Ram provided crucial situational awareness, leading to the successful quest that followed..He said it was crucial to recognise the pressing need for heightened surveillance amidst the prevailing geopolitical developments, which underscores the strategic significance of Lakshadweep to India.

Lakshadweep Island Administrator Praful Khoda Patel, who was the chief guest at the event said that approval for an airstrip at Minicoy is in the final stages, and that the 24-hour operational chopper hanger at Kavaratti will start soon. *—PTI*

India to expand ties with S Korea

SEOUL, 6 MARCH

S Jaishankar *PHOTO: PTI*

India wants to expand its strategic partnership with South Korea into new areas like critical and emerging technologies, semiconductors and green hydrogen to make the bilateral ties more contemporary, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday.

Jaishankar said this as he co-chaired the 10th India-South Korea Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) with his counterpart Cho Tae-yul in Seoul.

He said the two sides held a comprehensive and productive discussion on cooperation in the fields of defence, science and technology and trade.The conversations covered the expanded bilateral ties, cooperation in the field of defence, science and technology, people-to-people exchange and cultural cooperation, he said.

"Also spoke of advancing trilateral cooperation. Exchanged views on the developments in the Indo-Pacific, our convergences to challenges in the region and regional & global issues of mutual interest," Jaishankar said.

He said that during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to South Korea in 2015 the bilateral relations were elevated to a special strategic partnership. *—PTI*

42 VILLAGES AFFECTED IN THANE'S SHAHAPUR DUE TO WATER SHORTAGE

THANE, 6 MARCH

The number of hamlets and villages affected by acute water shortage in Shahapur taluka of Maharashtra's Thane district has gone up to 42 so far this year as compared to 26 in the corresponding period in 2023, prompting the administration to rope in more water tankers, officials said.

These figures were revealed by the Thane Zilla Parishad in its report on Wednesday.

Till 4 March this year, the population affected by water shortage in the taluka stood at 12,683 as compared to 9,871 last year.

Eight villages and 34 hamlets were affected by acute water shortage this year as compared to eight villages and 18 hamlets in the corresponding period last year, the report said.

A total of eight tankers were used last year to supply water to these affected villages and hamlets, which has now gone up to 15 this year, it added. *—PTI*

Naval Chief Admiral Hari Kumar presents a memento to Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Khoda Patel on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Kin write to PM for justice in 7-yr-old case

ERNAKULAM, 6 MARCH

Mishel Varghese *PHOTO: FB*

The family of CA student Mishel Shaji Varghese who was found dead in Kochi on 6 March, 2017, have written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging that the "proper investigation" was not conducted by the police and urged the Prime Minister's intervention to instruct an investigation by an able agency to bring the "truth out."

Her mother wrote to Modi on 15 January and alleged that the police are trying to protect someone.She listed evidence pointing out to be murder and alleged that the proper investigation was not conducted by the police.

She further stated that Modi gives utmost importance to the girl child and as a devastated mother who lost her child, I am requesting your kind intervention to instruct an investigation by an able agency like the Central Bureau of Investigation to bring the truth out.

Meanwhile, the father of Mishel Shaji Varghese alleged that the police didn't investigate the case properly.

—PTI

69 DEATHS LATER...

22 years post riots, Gulbarg Society sees a wedding

AHMEDABAD, 6 MARCH

More than 22 years after 69 people lost their lives in Ahmedabad's Gulbarg Society in one of the worst post-Godhra riots violence, a family residing there has found an occasion to celebrate with a pre-wedding function.

Several family members of Rafiq Mansuri, his friends, former neighbours and acquaintances gathered on Monday for the 'haldi' ceremony of his 19-year-old daughter Misbah at his residence in Ahmedabad's Gulbarg Society, which was largely abandoned after the 2002 massacre.

"It is for the first time in 22 years that a function has been organsied at the Gulbarg Society, giving us an occasion to cheer up," Mansuri said.

Several family members and neighbours gathered for the pre-wedding celebrations in Gulbarg Society *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

"I lost 19 members of my family in the massacre, and people deserted the locality after the incident," he said.

On Monday, Mansuri's relatives and acquaintances danced to popular Bollywood songs and enjoyed a meal together as part of his daughter's pre-wedding celebration.

They later proceeded to Barwani in Madhya Pradesh for his daughter's wedding at a mass marriage function organised on Wednesday.

"Misbah is the eldest of my three children. She has a younger sister and a brother. Since this is the first marriage in the family, we decided to organise a function at the Gulbarg Society itself," Mansuri said.

Mansuri, who was 30 years old when the massacre took place, said he was the only one to stay put in the society while other residents decided to leave the past and move on to other localities.

He lost 19 family members, including his wife, son and six children of other relatives. He later remarried.A mob had attacked Gulbarg Society, a pre-dominantly Muslim colony here, on 28 February, 2002, killing 69 people including former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri.

The massacre took place a day after a coach of the Sabarmati Express was burnt near Godhra station, killing 58 'karsevaks'.

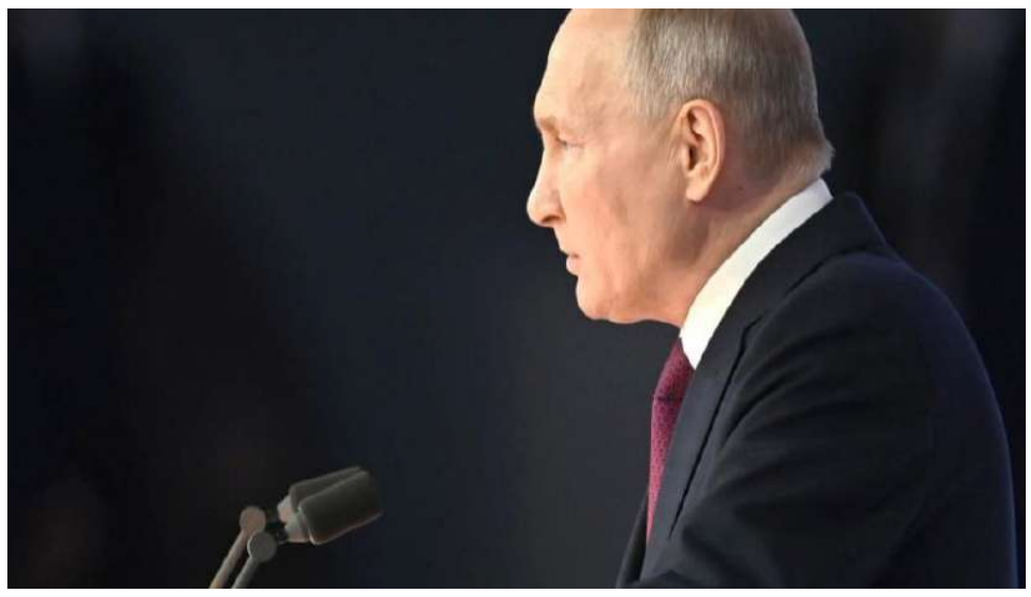
In June 2016, a special court convicted 24 people in the Gulbarg Society case, awarding life imprisonment to 11 of them. Thirty-six others were acquitted.

In June 2022, Supreme Court dismissed a plea of Ehsan Jafri's wife Zakia Jafri, challenging the Special Investigation Team's (SIT) clean chit to 64 people in the 2002 Gujarat riots case. *—PTI*

ISRAELI AIRCRAFT IN GAZA

At dawn on Saturday, Israeli aircraft bombed a mosque next to makeshift tents housing displaced people in the city of Deir el-Balah in the central #Gaza Strip.
PHOTO: Aljazeera

Putin's crackdown on dissent inside Russia



Russia evolved from tolerated dissent to one that ruthlessly suppresses it ***PHOTO: X/ PUTIN DIRECT***

When charismatic Opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was gunned down on a bridge near the Kremlin in February 2015, more than 50,000 Muscovites expressed their shock and outrage the next day at the brazen assassination. Police stood aside as they rallied and chanted anti-government slogans.

Nine years later, stunned and angry Russians streamed into the streets on the night of Feb 16, when they heard that popular Opposition politician Alexei Navalny had died in prison. But this time, those laying flowers at impromptu memorials in major cities were met by riot police, who arrested and dragged hundreds of them away.

In those intervening years, Vladimir Putin's Russia evolved from a country that tolerated some dissent to one that ruthlessly suppresses it. Arrests, trials and long prison terms — once rare — are commonplace, especially after Moscow invaded Ukraine.

Alongside its political opponents, the Kremlin now also targets rights groups, independent media and other members of civil-society organizations, LGBTQ+ activists and certain religious affiliations.

A month after making that comment to The Associated Press, the 70-year-old Orlov became one of his group's own statistics: He was handcuffed and hauled out of a courtroom after being convicted of criticizing the military over Ukraine and sentenced to 2½ years in prison.

Memorial estimates there are nearly 680 political prisoners in Russia. Another group, OVD-Info, said in November that 1,141 people are behind bars on politically motivated charges, with over 400 others receiving other punishment and nearly 300 more under investigation.

THE USSR VANISHES BUT REPRESSION RETURNS

There was a time after the collapse of the Soviet Union when it seemed Russia had turned a page and widespread repression was a thing of the past, said Orlov, a human rights advocate since the 1980s.

While there were isolated cases in the 1990s under President Boris Yeltsin, Orlov said major crackdowns began slowly after Putin came to power in 2000.

When Nadya Tolokonnikova and her fellow members of Pussy Riot were arrested in 2012 for performing an anti-Putin song in a main Orthodox cathedral in Moscow, their two-year prison sentence came as a shock, she recalled in an interview.

A RISING INTOLERANCE FOR DISSENT

When Putin regained the presidency in 2012 after evading term limits by serving four years as prime minister, he was greeted by mass protests. He saw these as Western-inspired and wanted to nip them in the bud, said Tatiana Stanovaya of Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 from Ukraine created a surge of patriotism and boosted Putin's popularity, emboldening the Kremlin. Authorities restricted foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations and rights groups, outlawing some as "undesirable," and targeted online critics with prosecutions, fines and occasionally jail.

After Navalny's poisoning, recuperation in Germany and arrest upon his return to Russia in 2021, repressions intensified. His entire political infrastructure was outlawed as extremist, exposing his allies and supporters to prosecution.

Orlov's group Memorial was shut down by the Supreme Court in 2021, the year before it won the Nobel Peace Prize as the hopeful symbol of a post-Soviet Russia. He recalled the disbelief about the court's ruling.

WAR AND REPRESSIVE NEW LAWS

With the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia enacted those repressive new laws that stifled any anti-war protests and criticism of the military. The number of arrests, criminal cases and trials mushroomed.

Charges varied — from donating money to rights groups helping Ukraine to involvement with Navalny's now "extremist" group.

Kremlin critics were imprisoned, and their prominence didn't seem to matter. Navalny eventually got 19 years, while another opposition foe, Vladimir Kara-Murza, got the harshest sentence of 25 years for treason.

Activists say prison sentences have gotten longer, compared with those before the war. In Orlov's case, prosecutors sought a retrial of his earlier conviction that initially drew only a fine; he later was sentenced to prison.

Another trend is an increase in trials in absentia, said Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms rights group. It counted 243 criminal cases on charges of "spreading false information" about the military, and 88 of them were against people outside Russia — including 20 who were convicted in absentia.

The system of oppression is designed "to keep people in fear," said Nikolay Petrov, visiting researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

Last week, thousands of people defied scores of riot police to mourn Navalny at his funeral in Moscow, chanting "No to war!" and "Russia without Putin!", slogans that result in arrests. Suprisingly police did not interfere. *—AP*

SALAR سالار بنگلور

Study finds toxic chemicals in recycled plastic

While India is pushing for plastic recycling to address plastic waste, a study conducted in Delhi has revealed a high presence of toxic chemicals in recycled products such as children's toys and food contact materials.

The study, conducted by the independent research and advocacy organisation Toxic Links, focused on five major chemicals known for their detrimental impact on human health -- phthalates; chlorinated paraffins; heavy metals such as palladium, chromium, cadmium, and arsenic; bisphenol A; and nonylphenol.

"The use of recycled plastic without any regulations is emerging as a major cause for concern across multiple sectors. This is due to the presence of often toxic chemicals in these plastics, which remain through the recycling process and are evident in the finished products," according to the study, released on Tuesday.

The field study showed that plastic recycling is extensively carried out in the informal sectors.

Toxic Links' previous work on the issue had also shown that such informal plastic recycling exists in most cities across the country.

The recycling units surveyed during the study were not following any established safety norms or standards related to the recycling process.

In molding units, where recycled pellets are used for manufacturing new products, quality and safety checks are not conducted on the possible chemicals in the recycled pellets nor their suitability for manufacturing.

When these units recycle plastic material into pellets, there are no processes to remove chemical additives.

These pellets are then used to make a range of new consumer products, such as toys, food containers or kitchen utensils.

Most of these recycled plastic products are cheaper than branded products of similar nature and, hence, are likely to be bought and used by lower-income groups or marginalised populations.

These populations are more susceptible to health impacts as their nutrition levels might be lower and access to good healthcare limited, said Priti Mahesh, Toxic Links' chief programme coordinator.

The study examined 15 samples, of which more than 60 per cent were found to contain the chemicals. The majority of these products were picked up from various markets, indicating their widespread availability.

Most of the chemicals detected were higher than the permissible limits (global standards, as India does not have standards for any of the aforementioned chemicals), Toxic Links said.

These chemicals have associated human health impacts, including disruption to endocrine, immune and reproductive systems.

Despite the complete ban on certain chemicals such as SCCPs and BPA, their presence in food contact materials poses a high risk of contamination for both children and adults, raising questions about the effectiveness of these bans, according to Toxic Links.

The presence of chemicals in toys, particularly, is very worrisome as this means exposure to children in their developing years, and many of the chemicals detected are known to cause development impacts, it said.

Although the presence of these toxic chemicals in food contact materials was found to lower than toys, detection of even minute traces of these substances in contact with food is alarming and means a risk to a much higher population.

Most countries, especially developing ones such as India, are pushing for plastics recycling as the best option for dealing with large amounts of plastic waste. These countries are pushing this as the main measure within the Global Plastic Treaty discussion as well.

The study findings indicate that policymakers should be concerned about the toxic nature of plastics, especially in recycled pellets, Toxic Links said.

Chemical additives and contaminants are not labelled or monitored and, with large amounts of plastic recycling occurring in the informal sector, this is a big concern.

The presence of toxic chemicals also points to the fact that uncontrolled use of toxic chemical additives in plastic products renders plastic recycling as an unviable option in some cases, especially for making new products with direct human contact, such as toys or food contact materials, Toxic Links said.These new products can be a cause of exposure to humans and the environment.

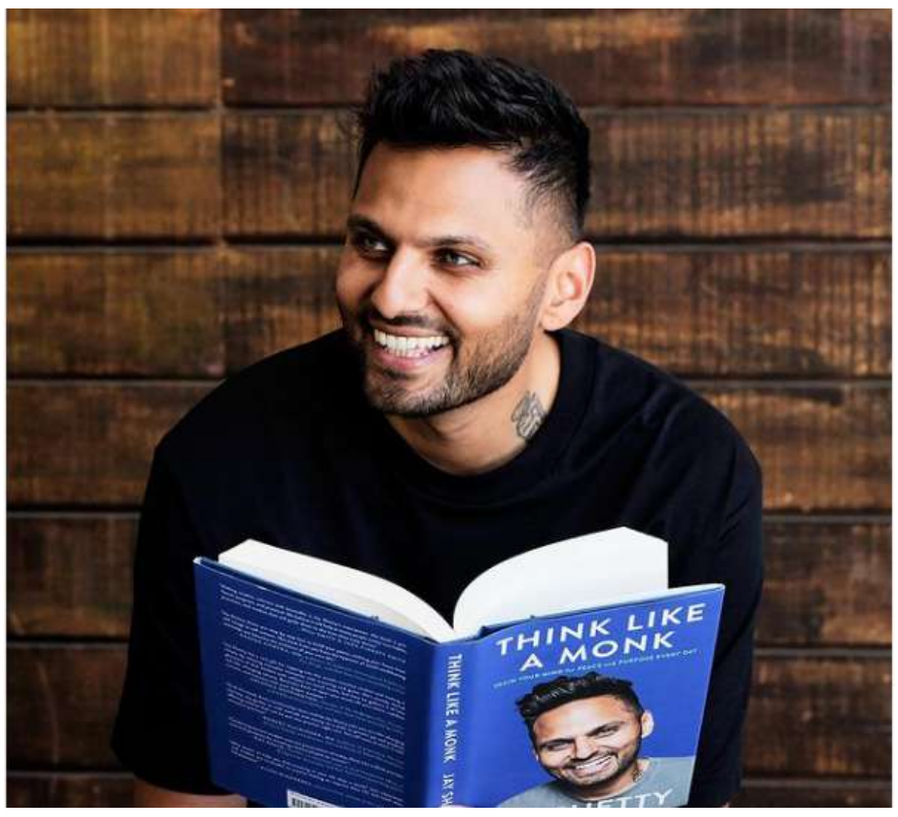
The study findings also clearly spell out the need for a reevaluation of "recycling" within the circular economy in plastic. Recycling systems are certainly not safe and need to be monitored.

The absence of labels in these low-quality, recycled products also is a reason for concern. *—PTI*

The use of recycled plastic without any regulations is emerging as a major cause for concern across multiple sectors. This is due to the presence of toxic chemicals in these plastics, which remain through the recycling process and are evident in the finished products ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

'Monk' influencer faked his life stories and content: Report



Jay Shetty, a popular life coach, author and podcaster ***PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/JAY SHETTY***

Presiding over it all was Jay Shetty, the former Hindu monk who's become a one-man self-help empire. Shetty and Lopez connected in January 2021 on the YouTube show Coach Conversations, a sponsored series produced by the handbag brand. Lopez grew so enamored of Shetty she invited him to officiate the ceremony.

Shetty has written two bestsellers: Think Like a Monk, a 2020 memoir/self-help guidebook based on his time studying Hinduism, and 2023's 8 Rules of Love, for helping people better maneuver their romantic relationships. Shetty also has a life-coaching business, the Jay Shetty Certification School, where students pay thousands of dollars to learn the Jay Shetty discipline. He has 14 million followers on Instagram and 6 million across his two YouTube channels.

In his origin story, which he tells in his books and countless podcast and talk-show appearances, Shetty is a business student, preparing himself for a life of corporate ladder-climbing, until one day he attends a guest talk by a monk. Shetty is so in awe that he seeks the holy man's tutelage. "It changed my life," Shetty said on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. "It was the most captivating presentation I've ever been to. He spoke about selflessness, service and kindness, and it just got me hooked."

After graduating, Shetty forgoes a life of material success to live as a monk himself. Three years later, he has another revelation: his purpose in life is not to live the humble life of a monk, but to use his preternatural oratory skills to share wisdom with the world.

Thus begins his transformation into a public self-help personality and his swift rise to fame.

But people close to Shetty have questioned whether his conversion to a life of monkhood was quite so dramatic.

The coaching school

The Jay Shetty Certification School pays OTHM, a private exam-certification company in the UK, to evaluate and certify its accreditation. It also claims that Ofqual, which regulates all exams for schools in England, "approves" the qualification.

Lawyers representing Shetty told the Guardian that the Jay Shetty Certification School is not approved by Ofqual but that it is an "OTHM Approved Center", and that OTHM is approved by Ofqual – and that, as a result, students are "eligible to progress" to certain programs "with advanced standing", as it says on the school's website.

> My whole life, I'd been fascinated by people who'd gone from nothing to something – rags-to-riches stories. —Jay Shetty, life coach

'Why did you become a monk?'

As Shetty tells it, he's an 18-year-old, first-year student at Cass Business School in London when one of his friends invites him to attend a lecture at the school given by an Iskcon monk named Gauranga Das. "I wasn't interested in hearing a monk's perspective on life," Shetty told DeGeneres. "My friend forced me to go. He promised me we would go to a bar afterwards."

That lecture ends up drastically altering the trajectory of Shetty's life. "My whole life, I'd been fascinated by people who'd gone from nothing to something – rags-to-riches stories," Shetty writes in Think Like a Monk. "Now, for the first time, I was in the presence of someone who'd deliberately done the opposite."

Shetty tells conflicting versions of the story. He often changes the age he says he was when the lecture occurred, telling different news outlets that he was 18, 21 or 22 years old when he attended the talk. On Shetty's own Genius website, it says Shetty heard "a monk speak for the first time when he was twenty one years old".

'Why not go the Krishna route?'

Dax Shepard asked Shetty this year on his Armchair Expert podcast about the particular form of Hinduism Shetty practices. "When you then decide to become a monk, why not go the Krishna route? Why did you end up in the Vedic world?" Shepard asked.

The Tom Cruise of Krishna

In 2016, Shetty left his job as a consultant to pursue a career. The video was made in what would become Shetty's signature style – delivering a non-stop stream of bumper-sticker wisdom and quotes from prominent spiritual and cultural figures (Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Ringo Starr). Shetty's first video was more overtly religious than much of his oeuvre. The new year's resolutions video was released on the YouTube channel Hare Krsna TV.

'Opposite path of a spiritual person'

Shetty also markets himself in his content as an authority on mental health. Last spring, Shetty wrote "7 easy ways to improve your mental health right now" in a blogpost for the meditation app Calm. A July 2022 YouTube video from Shetty instructs viewers: "Let's Talk About Mental Health." On his podcast, Shetty shared with his listeners "7 Things to Do This Weekend to Boost Your Mental Health" in an episode.

Shetty's former girlfriend Lila, a practicing psychotherapist for 13 years and the head of mental health services at a university in the UK, fears Shetty and his life-coaching school provide inaccurate and potentially dangerous mental health guidance.

"My issue as a mental health professional is that Shetty has misrepresented his persona, his knowledge and his credentials," Lila said. Shetty's rise has had few critics. When people do question Shetty, they are quickly dismissed.

What credentials does he hold to 'help people through their current struggles'?" *—THE GUARDIAN*

2 soldiers killed as militants attack troops in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, 6 MARCH

Two Pakistani soldiers were killed and one injured on Wednesday when militants attacked a team of the paramilitary Frontier Corps during a search operation in the country's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The paramilitary force team was conducting a search operation in the Sapari area of the Bannu District bordering Afghanistan after they came under attack while climbing a mountainous track, according to local sources. The fleeing militants opened fire at the team, killing two soldiers and injuring one. The dead and the injured were shifted to the Combined Military Hospital, Bannu, sources said. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attack on the security and eulogised the services of the security in the war against terrorism. Pakistan has witnessed a steady rise in terror attacks. Earlier this week, a polio worker and a policeman were injured when unknown gunmen opened fire at an anti-polio vaccination team in the province. *—PTI*

Japan to charge fee to climb Mount Fuji trail

SEOUL, 6 MARCH

People hoping to climb Mount Fuji using its most popular route will soon have to pay a $13 (£10) charge as authorities try to limit the numbers scaling Japan's famous volcano. Last year, more than 2,20,000 made the ascent between July and September. But congested routes, increasing injuries and rubbish littering the trail - not to mention badly dressed hikers - prompted officials to act. This year, just 4,000 people a day will be allowed up the Yoshida Trail. That trail, easily accessible from the capital, Tokyo, is currently the route of choice for more than 60 per cent of climbers. They will also not be allowed to set off between 16:00 and 02:00 - part of a bid to stop so-called "bullet climbs", when people try to scale the 3,776-metre (12,388-foot) summit without breaks. Numerous groups had been raising the alarm for some time. Masatake Izumi, a Yamanashi prefecture official, said last September the area faced "a real crisis". *—BBC News*

Russian spymaster says Navalny died of natural causes

MOSCOW, 6 MARCH

Russia's spymaster said on Tuesday that Opposition leader Alexei Navalny died of natural causes, a statement that appeared to reflect the Kremlin's efforts to assuage international outrage over the death of President Vladimir Putin's fiercest foe. Sergei Naryshkin, the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, the top spy agency known under its Russian acronym SVR, made the statement in an interview broadcast by Russian state television. He didn't name the cause of Navalny's death in a remote Arctic penal colony or give any other details. "Sooner or later life ends and people die," he said. *—AP*

Man receives 200 Covid jabs, study finds no fatigue

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Researchers have examined a man in Germany who claims to have received 217 vaccinations against Covid-19 and found that his immune system was fully functional. Until now, it has been unclear what effects hypervaccination such as this would have on the immune system. Some scientists were of the opinion that immune cells would become less effective after becoming used to the antigens. However, the case study published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases journal found that the immune system of the person is fully functional. More than 60 million people in Germany have been vaccinated againstS-CoV-2, a majority of them several times, the researchers said. The man examined by a team at FriedrichAlexander University ErlangenNurnberg (FAU) in Germany claims to have received 217 vaccinations for private reasons. "We then contacted him and invited him to undergo various tests in Erlangen (a city in Germany). He was very interested in doing so," he said. *—PTI*

Pak faces high inflation ahead of Ramadan

Low incomes, corruption are also major problems

KARACHI, 6 MARCH

As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, Pakistan, despite receiving billions of dollars as relief packages, is still not able to provide basic amenities to its people.

Low incomes, high prices of every commodity and empty markets, and to top it all, the arrival of holy month of Ramadan is now becoming a major problem for the majority of the population of Pakistan.

Manzoor Ahmed an auto driver from Karachi highlighted that even before Ramadan, the inflation is very high, stressing the need for the government to start providing relief to the people.

"Even before Ramadan the inflation is very high, it is high time that the government starts giving relief to the people. Some Budget Bazaars must be opened so that the public can buy thing a bit cheaper. All the basic needs of a family are costly.

Even after receiving billions of dollars as relief packages Pakistan is not able to rpovide basic amenities to their people ***PHOTO: ANI***

Everything like flour, sugar, oil and even petrol and gas is costly, managing everything is becoming difficult," he said.

Talking about his income and expenses, Ahmed said that he barely manages his expenses. "I myself am barely able to manage my expenses. Out of the PKR 300 or 400 I make in a day, it becomes very difficult to pay rent and I have to pay high prices for electricity, even when I the supply of electricity is insufficient. Very often we don't get electricity for over 12 hours a day," he added.

Another citizen from Karachi noted that corruption is the main cause of all the problems even during the month of Ramadan. *—ANI*

PML-N BECOMES LARGEST PARTY IN PAKISTAN

ISLAMABAD, 6 MARCH

Ex-premier Nawaz Sharif led-PML-N has become the largest political party in Pakistan's National Assembly after the number of its seats surged to 123, following the distribution of reserved seats denied to former prime minister Imran Khan backed-SIC, a media report said on Wednesday. Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) ruled that former prime minister's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf- (PTII) backed Sunni Ittehad Council is not eligible for the reserved seats allotted to women and minorities in Parliament and their share of seats should be allocated to other parties. Almost all 93 independently elected candidates had joined right-wing SIC. *—PTI*

HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEYS

Maldives not to renew agreement with India

MALE, 6 MARCH

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu ***PHOTO: PTI***

Maldives will not renew an agreement with India to conduct hydrographic surveys and plans to acquire the facilities and machines required to do the exercise by itself, President Mohamed Muizzu has announced.

Muizzu also announced that his country is working to establish a 24X7 monitoring system for the Maldivian waters this month to ensure control of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) despite its significantly large area.

The development comes days after China signed a defence cooperation agreement with the Maldives to provide free military assistance to foster "stronger" bilateral ties.

India-Maldives ties have suffered a setback ever since pro-China Muizzu assumed office last year. Hours after he took oath in November 2023, Muizzu had vowed to ensure Maldives' sovereignty and one of the first steps was to demand India to withdraw all its troops.

Muizzu's announcement also comes days after a Chinese research vessel spent about a week around Male and more than a month just outside Maldives' EEZ.

Speaking at a ceremony at one of the islands that he was visiting on Monday, Muizzu said, the Maldives Ministry of Defence is making efforts to obtain the facilities required for conducting the hydrographic surveys by the country itself.

"This will allow Maldives to conduct the underwater surveys of the country by ourselves. We will then acquire all insights of our underwater features and prepare charts, they will be drawn by us," the president was quoted as saying by Edition.mv, a news portal on Tuesday.

Maldives' former administration, led by then President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, had signed an agreement with the Indian government to conduct hydrographic surveys of Maldives' underwater features.

"We decided not to renew the agreement entered into with the Indian government to scan and acquire all insights into our underwater bodies. All these underwater details are our property, our heritage," Muizzu said. *—PTI*

US destroyer shoots down missile launched by Houthis

The assault targeted the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer ***PHOTO: X/CENTCOM***

DUBAI, 6 MARCH

A US destroyer shot down drones and a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels toward it in the Red Sea, officials said early Wednesday, as the Indian navy released images of it fighting a fire aboard a container ship earlier targeted by the Houthis.

The assault Tuesday apparently targeted the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that has been involved in the American campaign against the rebels who have launched attacks over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The Houthi attack involved bomb-carrying drones and one anti-ship ballistic missile, the US military's Central Command said.

The US later launched an airstrike destroying three anti-ship missiles and three bomb-carrying drone boats, Central Command said. Brig Gen Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesman, acknowledged the attack, but claimed its forces targeted two American warships, without elaborating.

The Houthis "will not stop until the aggression is stopped and the siege on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is lifted," Saree said. Saree did not acknowledge the later U.S. airstrikes. The Houthis have not offered any assessment of the damage they've suffered in the American-led strikes that began in January, though it has said at least 22 of its fighters have been killed.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo bound for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite more than a month and a half of US-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels have remained capable of launching significant attacks. *—AP*

TRUMP TAKES CONTROL

Nikki Haley to suspend presidential campaign

NEW YORK, 6 MARCH

Nikki Haley will suspend her presidential campaign on Wednesday after being soundly defeated across the country on Super Tuesday, according to people familiar with her decision. This leaves Donald Trump as the last remaining major candidate for the 2024 Republican nomination.

Haley, a former South Carolina governor and UN ambassador, was Trump's first significant rival when she jumped into the race in February 2023. She spent the final phase of her campaign aggressively warning the GOP against embracing Trump, whom she argued was too consumed by chaos and personal grievance to defeat President Joe Biden in the general election.

Her departure clears Trump to focus solely on his likely rematch in November with Biden. The former president is on track to reach the necessary 1,215 delegates to clinch the Republican nomination later this month.

Haley's defeat marks a painful, if predictable, blow to those voters, donors and Republican Party officials who opposed Trump and his fiery brand of "Make America Great Again" politics. She was especially popular among moderates and college-educated voters, constituencies that will likely play a pivotal role in the general election. It's unclear whether Trump, who recently declared that Haley donors would be permanently banned from his movement, can ultimately unify a deeply divided party.

Haley leaves the 2024 presidential contest having made history as the first woman to win a Republican primary. She beat Trump in the District of Columbia on Sunday and Vermont on Tuesday. *—AP*

Nikki Haley ***PHOTO: PTI***

- The former president is on track to reach the necessary 1,215 delegates to clinch the Republican nomination later this month

Taiwan minister apologises after remarks on Indians

BEIJING/TAIPEI, 6 MARCH

Hsu Ming-chun, Taiwan's Labour Minister ***PHOTO: MOL.GOV.TW***

Taiwan's Labour Minister Hsu Ming-chun has apologised for her inappropriate comments on her government's plans to recruit Indian migrant workers from a particular region which drew sharp criticism for being "racist".

Taiwan plans to recruit Indian workers after signing an MOU with India on February 16 to bolster people-to-people exchanges between the two countries and help alleviate labour shortages in Taiwan's industries, according to a recent statement by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Elaborating on the recruitment plan, Hsu in a talk show on Taiwan television said her ministry will first recruit Indian workers from the North-Eastern states of India because "their skin colour and dietary habits are closer to ours," Taiwan's Central News Agency reported on Tuesday. In addition, Hsu reported to have said the Indians there are "mostly Christians" who are adept at manufacturing, construction, and farming.

Significantly, Hsu said the recruitment strategy was based on Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) assessments, according to the report.

Her comments drew sharp criticism from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party legislator Chen Kuan-ting who in a posting on X "strongly condemned" Hsu's comments, arguing that skin colour and race should not be criteria for recruiting migrant workers.

"In response to recent statements from the Minister of Labour, I wish to express my strong condemnation. As a member of Parliament, I want to reaffirm that Taiwan values everyone, irrespective of their race, culture, or religion. It is my firm belief that individuals from all backgrounds deserve respect, and I am committed to upholding this principle in Taiwan," he said in a video post. *—PTI*

10M Thais had smog-related illness in 2023

BANGKOK, 6 MARCH

More than 10 million Thais sought treatment for illnesses linked to air pollution in 2023, authorities said. The data from the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) come as Thailand's air quality is worsening.

Widespread farm burning and forest fires, notably in the country's north, often create a noxious smog at the beginning of the year. The start of 2024 has already seen a jump in cases of pollution-related diseases compared to the previous year. From 1.3 million in the first nine weeks of 2023, the number of people seeking treatment for pollution-related illnesses increased to 1.6 million at the start of 2024, AFP reported.

The data from the National Economic and Social Development Council come as Thailand's air quality is worsening ***PHOTO: PTI***

Thailand has a population of about 72 million. The cases include those with chronic conditions such as lung cancer, bronchitis, asthma, and heart diseases. Thailand must "prioritise... the impact of PM2.5 on public health", the NESDC said. PM 2.5 refers to the level of tiny, hazardous particles - with diameters that are 2.5 micrometres or smaller - that can enter bloodstreams though the lungs.

Exposure to these micro-pollutants can cause burning and itching in the eyes and skin, as well as coughing and chest tightness. These symptoms may be amplified for those who have pre-existing heart or lung conditions.

Some of Thailand's northern cities have been cited as among the world's most polluted by air quality monitoring websites. Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Lampang have been given "unhealthy" ratings by monitoring platform IQAir. *—BBC News*

- These symptoms may be amplified for those who have pre-existing heart or lung conditions

Lanka hopes to clinch debt repayment moratorium: Prez

COLOMBO, 6 MARCH

Sri Lanka hopes to avoid repaying debt till December 2027 after the completion of the ongoing restructuring process and repay them in the period running up to 2042, President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Wednesday, as he defended his unpopular reform plans to revive the bankrupt economy.

Sri Lanka is currently stuck with debt restructuring with negotiations taking a long to reach an agreement. "By 2022, Sri Lanka had to meet external debt repayments worth 6 billion per year. It is 9.5 per cent of the GDP and an amount hard to sustain," he said.

Wickremesinghe ***PHOTO: PTI***

"We hope to reduce this to 4.5 per cent of the GDP by debt restructuring", Wickremesinghe, also the cash-strapped island nation's finance minister, stressed. "Currently we are actively engaged in discussions regarding the restructuring of all loans including domestic and foreign loans. We are optimistic that these negotiations will reach a successful resolution soon. Our goal is to obtain temporary relief from debt defaults from 2023 to 2027. Subsequently, we plan to diligently work towards repaying the loans in the period from 2027 to 2042".

He said if the country was able to maintain the economic momentum gained since 2022 after the economic crisis, the state revenue could be maintained at a higher level making it easy for the debt repayment. He said through his unpopular hard economic reforms the state revenue collection had been raised to 11 per cent of the GDP. *—PTI*

PALESTINIAN DEATH TOLL TOPS 30,700: GAZA'S HEALTH MINISTRY

RAFAH, 6 MARCH

Gaza's Health Ministry says the Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war has climbed to 30,717. It said on Wednesday that 86 bodies were brought to local hospitals in the last 24 hours, in addition to 113 wounded people.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and maintains detailed casualty records. Its figures from previous wars have largely matched those of the United Nations, independent experts and even Israeli counts. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tallies, but says women and children make up around two-thirds of those killed.It says the real toll is higher as there are bodies buried in the rubble from Israeli airstrikes and in areas that paramedics cannot access. It says over 72,000 people have been wounded in the war.

Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence. *—AP*

AFTER LOOKING FOR A SAFE SHELTER

At least 96K Afghan migrants return to home

KABUL, 6 MARCH

Taliban-led Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation has said that more than 96,000 migrants from Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey have returned to Afghanistan in a month, according to TOLO news.

The ministry noted that assistance has been provided to all returnees. "In the month of Dalw (January), 96,490 migrants came from Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey. We have committees, at the borders they are given travel allowances, food and non-food assistance, and winter clothes, and they are transferred to their original provinces [states]. Each family is given ten thousand in cash assistance," said Abdul Rahman Rashid, the deputy minister of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation.

Concurrently, some of the repatriated migrants are requesting that the Taliban provide them with employment possibilities. Payinda discussed the challenges of migration after returning to the nation with his seven-member family from Pakistan. "They would rob us of our money. We came to Afghanistan because we were unable to travel freely or visit the doctor," he remarked. Millions of people have been compelled to flee the nation due to the hostilities of recent years. "They took my husband, and later my husband called to say that he had been imprisoned, after four days I went and said give us three days, we will leave from here," said Nazanin, one of the returnees from Iran. *—ANI*

The ministry said that assistance has been provided to all returnees ***PHOTO: X***

Sensex, Nifty scale new lifetime highs on gains in banking

Sensex jumped 408.86 pts to settle at a new record high of 74,085.99

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty rebounded from early lows and settled at fresh record high levels in a volatile trade on Wednesday following buying in private bank and select IT shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 408.86 points or 0.55 per cent to settle at a new record high of 74,085.99. During the day, it went up by 474.14 points or 0.64 per cent to hit an all-time high of 74,151.27. The index had opened lower and later fell to a day's low of 73,321.48 in the first half.

The broader Nifty climbed 117.75 points or 0.53 per cent to settle at a lifetime high of 22,474.05. During the day, it jumped 140.9 points or 0.63 per cent to reach its record high of 22,497.20.

The benchmark indices traded lower in the first half of the session but gains in private banks and pharma shares and firm European markets helped erase losses, analysts said.

Sun Pharma hit a 52-week high before closing at Rs 1,603.90, up by 1.89 per cent, after reports said that the USFDA has classified its Ankleshwar unit as No Action Indicated **PHOTO: ANI**

Among Sensex firms, Kotak Mahindra Bank rose the most by 2.47 per cent. Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, HCL Technologies, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan and Tata Consultancy Services were among the major gainers.

UltraTech Cement, NTPC, Maruti, JSW Steel, Power Grid and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

"Global markets witnessed mixed signals ahead of the US FED chair's testimony to Congress. The domestic market exhibited a smart recovery in the second half, reversing initial losses as buying picked up in large-cap stocks," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

The tone was negative in the first half, tracking weak global cues, however, resilience in banking combined with sharp recovery in the IT and FMCG majors completely changed the mood as the day progressed, Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.91 per cent and midcap index fell by 0.65 per cent.

Among the indices, bankex climbed 0.99 per cent, teck jumped 0.87 per cent, IT (0.66 per cent), consumer durables were among the gainers.

Services declined 2.03 per cent, realty dipped 1.40 per cent, power (1.07 per cent), oil & gas (0.85 per cent) and commodities (0.76 per cent).

Shares of JM Financial closed nearly 11 per cent lower after the Reserve Bank imposed restrictions on group firm JM Financial Products Ltd.

IIFL Finance Ltd tanked 20 per cent to hit the lower circuit at Rs 382.80 on BSE, extending losses for the second day after RBI action against the company.

Indian-Canadian billionaire Prem Watsa-backed Fairfax India announced its commitment to provide up to USD 200 million (about Rs 1,650 crore) liquidity support to IIFL Finance after the Reserve Bank of India barred the non-bank lender from disbursing gold loans. *—PTI*

Rupee rises 7 paise to settle at 82.83 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

The rupee appreciated 7 paise to settle at 82.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, buoyed by a weak American currency against major rivals overseas and a rally in domestic equities.However, surging crude oil prices in international markets put pressure on the local currency and restricted the rise, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.90 and oscillated between the peak of 82.82 and the lowest level of 82.91 against the greenback during intra-day deals. The currency finally settled at 82.83 (provisional), registering a gain of 7 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee settled flat at 82.90 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined by 0.19 per cent to 103.55. Analysts attributed the downward movement in the dollar index to the services PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index) data in the US, which showed the sector's growth in February fell short of expectations. *—PTI*

Gold rises Rs 150; silver declines Rs 400

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Gold prices on Wednesday rose by Rs 150 to Rs 65,150 per 10g in the national capital amid strong global cues, according to HDFC Securities. Extending gains for the second straight day, the precious metal touched a fresh lifetime of Rs 65,150 per 10g. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 65,000 per 10g. However, silver prices declined by Rs 400 to Rs 74,500 per kg. In the previous close, it had settled at Rs 74,900 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 65,150 per 10 grams, up by Rs 150, taking bullish cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,122 per ounce.*—PTI*

Gujarat to buy power from NLCIL's 600 MW Khavda solar project

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Gujarat UrjaVikas Nigam Ltd (GUVNL) has signed an agreement with an NLC India subsidiary to purchase power from its upcoming 600 MW solar project in Gujarat. The subsidiary, NLC India Green Energy Ltd (NIGEL), has signed the power purchase agreement with GUVNL for the proposed Khavda Solar Park in Bhuj. The entire power from the project will be procured by GUVNL at a tariff of Rs 2.705/kWhr (kilowatt hour), NLC India Ltd (NLCIL) said in a BSE filing. The project is expected to generate 1,577.88 million units of green energy every year and 39.447 billion units on a cumulative basis over its lifetime, offsetting around 35.5 million metric tonne of Co2 emissions.NIGEL Chairman Prasanna Kumar Motupalli said, "The project has the benefit of being established in a solar park with readily available infrastructure and with payment security for power sold." *—PTI*

ESIC gives Rs 1K crore for construction of 7 hospitals

BENGALURU, 6 JAN

Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) has approved Rs 1,128.21 crore for construction of seven ESI Hospitals in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. The decision was taken at a meeting of Standing Committee of ESIC on Tuesday. The seven ESI Hospitals will be constructed at Harohalli, Narsapura, Bommasandra (Karnataka), Merrut, Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh), Pithampur (Madhya Pradesh) and Duburi (Odisha). Construction of these hospitals will start soon. *—PTI*

Asia-Pacific firms face escalating risks, defaults mount: Moody's

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

In a report released by Moody's, a stark warning has been issued regarding the escalating risks facing Asia-Pacific nonfinancial corporates.

The report highlights a concerning trend in credit outlooks, indicating a notable increase in risks for these entities.

According to the report, by the end of 2023, the share of ratings with a stable outlook in the Asia-Pacific corporate portfolio had declined significantly, plummeting from 83 per cent at the end of 2022 to a mere 68 per cent.

This decrease is accompanied by a substantial rise in the share of ratings with negative implications, which surged from 13 per cent to 29 per cent over the same period.

The report highlights a concerning trend in credit outlooks **PHOTO: X**

One of the most alarming statistics revealed in the report is the 12-month trailing high-yield corporate default rate, which stood at 8.0 per cent at the end of 2023.

While this rate represents a decrease from the previous year, with 12 defaults recorded compared to 24 in 2022, the severity of the defaults is not to be underestimated.

Notably, two-thirds of the defaults in 2023 were classified as distressed exchanges, signaling significant financial distress among corporations.

—ANI

UAE to give insurance to blue-collar Indian workers

DUBAI, 6 MARCH

India's consulate in Dubai has unveiled a new insurance package for blue-collar Indian workers to provide financial benefits to the kin of the deceased in case of natural and accidental deaths.

The Consulate General of India in Dubai facilitated meetings between major companies recruiting Indian blue-collar workers and insurance service providers to arrive at a package which could cover natural and accidental deaths of the workers in the UAE, a press release said on Tuesday. The press release said that the move came after it was "noticed that most companies are insuring their employees under Health Insurance and Workers' Compensation [work-related injuries & deaths]." Insurance providers Gargash Insurance Services LLC and Orient Insurance PJSC agreed to issue a Life Protection Plan (LPP) for blue-collar workers and other employees covering death due to any cause -- natural or accidental. The LPP is effective from 1 March.

The terms and conditions on how the plan will be implemented were worked out between the companies and the insurance service providers, the press release said.

Around 3.5 million Indians reside in the UAE, of which about 65 per cent are blue-collar workers, who form one of the largest groups of migrant workers in the UAE.

In 2022, the consulate registered a total of 1,750 death cases, of which around 1,100 were workers. Last year, about 1,000 deaths were recorded for workers from the total count of 1,513. In more than 90 per cent of the cases, the cause of death is natural. *—PTI*

JM FINANCIAL SHARES TANK 19%; MCAP DOWN BY RS 1,484 CR

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Shares of JM Financial on Wednesday tanked over 19 per cent after the Reserve Bank imposed restrictions on group firm JM Financial Products Ltd after finding that the company indulged in various manipulations.

The stock tumbled 19.29 per cent to Rs 77.10 on the BSE. At the NSE, it plummeted 18.75 per cent to Rs 77.55. The company's market capitalisation (mcap) declined by Rs 1,484.53 crore to Rs 7,643.63 crore.

The Reserve Bank on Tuesday imposed restrictions on JM Financial Products Ltd after finding that the company indulged in various manipulations, including repeatedly helping a group of its own customers to bid for various IPOs by using loaned funds.

In a major regulatory action, the central bank has barred the systemically important non-deposit-taking NBFC from providing any kind of financing against shares and debentures. *—PTI*

Around 3.5 million Indians reside in the UAE, of which about 65 per cent are blue-collar workers **PHOTO: KHALEEJ TIMES**

DBS cuts 27% salary of CEO for 'tech glitches'

SINGAPORE, 6 MARCH

The salary of DBS Bank's Chief Executive Piyush Gupta was cut by a hefty 27 per cent to SGD 11.2 million (about Rs 69 crore) last year for various incidents of technical glitches, the bank said in its annual report.

In 2022, Gupta received a salary of SGD 15.4 million.

The Singapore-based bank had, in February, said that the 2023 variable compensation for its CEO and other members of the group management committee has been cut, holding them accountable for the series of digital disruptions that took place last year.

"While the bank fared well against most priorities on its balanced scorecard, it fell short in technology resiliency. This and the resultant impact on customers and the franchise were taken into account when determining the scorecard performance of both the Group and the CEO," The Straits Times quoted from the bank's latest annual report.

This pay cut was taken despite the bank's record 2023 profits and outperformance in many areas, it added.

—PTI

RBI asks banks to give customers choice of other card networks

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

Reserve Bank has directed banks to provide their eligible customers with an option to choose from multiple card networks at the time of issuing credit or debit cards, a move which will benefit card users.

The central bank also asked issuers of credit cards not to enter into any arrangement or agreement with card networks that restrain customers from availing the services of other networks.

For the existing cardholders, this option may be provided at the time of the next renewal, it said.

"The RBI being satisfied that it is necessary and expedient, in the interest of payment system and public interest, to do so, hereby, directs... Card issuers shall not enter into any arrangement or agreement with card networks that restrain them from availing the services of other card networks," it said.

The circular listed authorised card networks -- American Express Banking Corp, Diners Club International Ltd, MasterCard Asia/Pacific Pte Ltd, and National Payments Corporation of India -- Rupay and Visa Worldwide Pte Limited.

Card issuers and networks will have to ensure adherence to the RBI's guidelines in existing agreements at the time of amendment or renewal and when fresh agreements are executed, it said.

However, it said the direction would not be applicable to credit card issuers with number of active cards issued by them being 10 lakh or less in number. *—PTI*

NPCI, IISc joins hands for research on AI

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) on Wednesday announced the signing of a multi-year memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, for conducting joint research on blockchain and artificial intelligence (AI) technology. The partnership will also propel further innovation through the establishment of the "NPCI-IISc Centre of Excellence for Deep Tech Research and Development".

The partnership will focus on scalable blockchain platforms and multi-modal analytics over fintech data. Faculty members from five departments at IISc will work with NPCI researchers. NPCI's collaboration with IISc is aimed at solving complex technological and engineering problem statements in scalability, privacy-preserving designs, neural networks, graph AI, large language models, and etc. Mumbai's Fintechstartup, Tech Fini, announced that it has joined hands with NPCI to offer UPI 2.0. *—PTI*

WILL BE MIDDLE-INCOME NATION

Crisil said the Indian economy will take support from domestic structural reforms **PHOTO: X**

India's 2024 GDP may rise from 6.1% to 6.8%: Report

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Crisil Ratings on Wednesday projected India's GDP growth at 6.8 per cent in the next fiscal and said the country will become an upper middle-income nation by 2031 with the economy doubling to USD 7 trillion.

In its India Outlook report, Crisil said the Indian economy will take support from domestic structural reforms and cyclical levers and can retain -- perhaps even improve -- its growth prospects to become the third largest economy by 2031.

"After a better-than-expected 7.6 per cent this fiscal, India's real GDP growth will likely moderate to 6.8 per cent in fiscal 2025," said Crisil India Outlook report. It said that the next seven fiscals (2025-2031) will see the Indian economy crossing the USD 5 trillion-mark and inching closer to USD 7 trillion.

"A projected average expansion of 6.7 per cent in this period will make India the third-largest economy in the world and lift per capita income to the upper-middle income category by 2031," Crisil said.

India, with a GDP size of USD 3.6 trillion, is currently the fifth largest economy in the world, after the US, China, Japan and Germany.

Crisil expects the economy to expand to USD USD 6.7 trillion by fiscal 2031.

Fiscal 2031 will mark the year when India enters the club of upper middle-income countries with per-capita income rising to USD 4,500, Crisil said.

As per World Bank definition, lower-middle income countries are those with per-capita income of USD 1,000-4,000, and upper-middle income countries are those with per capita income between USD 4,000-12,000. *—PTI*

Musk agreed ChatGPT maker should work for profit, claims OpenAI

WASHINGTON, 6 MARCH

OpenAI shot back at accusations from Elon Musk that the ChatGPT maker betrayed its founding goals of benefiting humanity and chose to pursue profits, vowing to get his lawsuit thrown out.

The first comments from OpenAI since the Tesla CEO sued last week have escalated the feud between the San Francisco-based artificial intelligence company and the billionaire that bankrolled its creation years ago.

"The mission of OpenAI is to ensure AGI benefits all of humanity, which means both building safe and beneficial AGI and helping create broadly distributed benefits," OpenAI said in a blog post late Thursday from five company leaders, including CEO Sam Altman. "We intend to move to dismiss all of Elon's claims."

AGI refers to artificial general intelligence, which are general purpose AI systems that can perform just as well as — or even better than — humans in a wide variety of tasks.

Musk's lawsuit said that when he funded OpenAI as it was launching, he secured an agreement that the company would remain a nonprofit developing technology for the benefit of the public.

His lawsuit claims breach of contract and seeks an injunction preventing anyone — including Microsoft, which has invested billions in OpenAI — from benefiting financially from its technology.

OpenAI said both the startup and Musk recognized the need for the company to become a for-profit entity, posting screenshots of emails between the Tesla CEO and OpenAI leaders in which they discuss the possibility but can't agree on terms.

"Change your name," Musk replied Wednesday on X, the social media platform he owns that's formerly known as Twitter.

He also posted a laughing emoji in response to a user who tweeted that OpenAI should be renamed OpenEmail.

Musk was an early investor in OpenAI when it was founded in 2015 and co-chaired its board alongside Altman.

He said in his lawsuit that he invested "tens of millions" of dollars in OpenAI. *—PTI*

Elon Musk and Sam Altman **PHOTO: ANI**

SURPASS PRE-COVID LEVELS

Indian air traffic to reach 150M this fiscal: Icra

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The domestic air passenger traffic is expected to surpass the pre-Covid levels of 141.2 million and reach 150-155 million this fiscal, registering an estimated growth of 8-13 per cent, credit ratings agency Icra said on Wednesday.

Icra also projected a significant reduction in industry's net loss for the next two fiscals and was also of the view that supply-chain challenges and engine failure issues may remain near-term headwinds. Icra maintains a "stable" outlook on the domestic aviation industry, amidst the continued recovery in domestic and international air passenger traffic, and relatively stable cost environment, it said.

Icra maintains a stable outlook on the domestic aviation industry **PHOTO: PTI**

The momentum in traffic growth is expected to continue in FY2025 as well, with a similar estimated year-on-year growth, aided by rising demand for both leisure and business travel and improving airport infrastructure, it said.

The international passenger traffic for Indian carriers surpassed the pre-Covid levels in FY2023, although it trailed the peak levels of 25.9 million witnessed in FY2019, according to Icra.

It is expected to cross this level in the current fiscal, with an estimated 25-27 million passengers, representing a YoY growth of 7-12 per cent, the ratings agency said, adding the same is expected to further grow by 7-12 per cent to 27-29 million in FY2025.

The industry is estimated to report a significantly lower net loss of Rs 3,000-4,000 crore in FY2024 and FY2025 compared to Rs 170-175 billion in FY2023, he added. *—PTI*

India to press for 4-1, England too fancy themselves at 'home'

There's a guy named Pant: Rohit on Yashasvi remark

DHARAMSALA, 6 MARCH

England has already lost the series, their first in the 'Bazball' era, but there is still plenty to play for before they return home after a long tour.

Bairstow's 100th Test milestone will be celebrated through the week and by the looks of it, the England cricketers are enjoying in this scenic town with the cold weather adding to their comfort.

The right-hander has been well below par in the series and would be aiming to make his 100th Test outing an unforgettable one by regaining his lost form. England fans have also arrived here in big numbers, giving the players another reason to come up with a special performance.

India's premier off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will be eyeing a memorable outing in his landmark 100th Test when the unassailable hosts face a fallen England in the finale of what has been a riveting five-match series, here on Thursday.

India's Devdutt Padikkal and Yashasvi Jaiswal during a training session ahead of the fifth Test *PHOTO: PTI*

India maintained their envious record at home by sealing the series in Ranchi and now, they will be looking for another favourable result to extend their lead in World Test Championships standings.

Jasprit Bumrah will return to bolster the attack with Mohammed Siraj being the second pacer. Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav, who have been able to play only 11 Tests since making a successful debut back here in 2017, will share the duties in the spin department.

K L Rahul not regaining full fitness even for this game could provide another opportunity to the struggling Rajat Patidar, who has found bizarre ways to get out in his debut series, aggregating only 63 runs in six innings at number four.

Two-Test-old Sarfaraz Khan could not score big in Ranchi after a stellar debut in Rajkot and he will be desperate to make it big before the red ball season comes to a close.

India captain **Rohit Sharma** was in no mood to duck bouncers as he attended the press conference on the eve of the 5th Test against England in Dharamsala. Rohit, on being asked about the comment from England batter Ben Duckett about the visiting team taking credit for Yashasvi Jaiswal's attacking heroics, sent a firm 'Rishabh Pant reminder' to everyone. Hitting sixers in the media conference on Wednesday, Rohit had no hesitation in suggesting to the England team, especially Ben Duckett, that they have probably not seen Rishabh Pant bat, hence such a comment was made."There was a guy called Rishabh Pant in our team, probably Ben Duckett hasn't seen him play," Rohit said when asked about the comment made by the England batter.

Rohit Sharma *PHOTO: PTI*

—PTI

RANJI TROPHY

Vidarbha defeated their rivals by 62 runs *PHOTO: PTI*

Vidarbha defeat MP by 62 runs, to meet Mumbai in final

NAGPUR, 6 MARCH

The pace bowling pair of Aditya Thakare and Yash Thakur battered the Madhya Pradesh tail as Vidarbha defeated their rivals by 62 runs to set up a Ranji Trophy title clash with Mumbai, here on Wednesday.

Madhya Pradesh, who were in a precarious position at stumps on day four at 228/6 requiring 93 more runs to win, withered in the face of hostile bowling from the duo who shared the spoils in the first session of the final day to earn Vidarbha a memorable semifinal win.

Madhya Pradesh was finally bundled out for 258 in 81.3 overs as their hopes of entering the final for the third time in the premier domestic tournament were dashed.

This is Vidarbha's third entry into the Ranji final, and on both occasions they have won the title, defeating Delhi (2017-18) and Saurashtra (2018-19) respectively.

Chasing a target of 321 for victory, Madhya Pradesh, the 2021-22 Ranji champion, was still in the match despite losing six wickets, but Thakare and Thakur were on song on the final day, with the early morning freshness of the wicket helping them extract a fair bit of bounce and movement.

Anubhav Agarwal was the next to depart, clean bowled for a duck by Thakare, leaving MP tottering at 234 for 8 and virtually extinguishing their chances of making it to the Ranji final for the third time.

Kulwant Khejroliya too went cheaply to signal celebrations on the Akshay Wadkar-led side.

Vidarbha will take on 41-time champions Mumbai in the final on 10 March.

Brief scores: Vidarbha 170 & 402 in 101.3 overs (Aman Mokhade 59, Yash Rathod 141, Akshay Wadkar 77; Anubhav Agarwal 5/92) beat Madhya Pradesh 252 and 258 in 81.3 overs (Yash Dubey 94, Harsh Gawali 67; Aditya Sarwate 2/56, Aditya Thakare 2/45, Yash Thakur 3/60, Akshay Wakhare 3/342) 62 runs.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

WFI to allow only 'genuine' wrestlers to compete at trials

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) will allow wrestlers from their original states to compete at the upcoming trials and one grappler will be allowed to participate in more than one category over two days of selection competition, starting 10 March.In its circular issued on Tuesday, the WFI, wrote, "Wrestlers who participated in Senior National Championship held at Jaipur will bring their WFI Licence Book, Birth Certificate, and Adhar Card to verify the genuineness of their state.""Several wrestlers, who hailed from Haryana, represented states like Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim at the Nationals conducted by the ad-hoc committee in Jaipur. This is wrong and we will now allow this," a WFI source told PTI. "Sikkim and Arunachal are not even affiliated state bodies. *—PTI*

PHOTO: IANS

Nagal loses to Hong in final qualifying round

INDIAN WELLS, 6 MARCH

Indian tennis ace Sumit Nagal went down to South Korea's Seong-chan Hong after putting up a spirited fight in the final qualifying round of the Indian Wells Masters here.The 26-year-old Nagal lost 6-2, 2-6, 6-7 (4-7) on Tuesday.Earlier, Nagal brushed past the challenge of American wildcard Stefan Dostanic in straight sets in his first outing at the Indian Wells Masters on Monday.India's No. 1 singles player beat Dostanic in straight sets 6-2, 6-2 in the first round of the qualifying.*—AP*

Shabnim Ismail bowls fastest delivery, 130kph

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

South African pacer Shabnim Ismail created history by bowling the fastest delivery ever recorded in women's cricket, breaching the 130kph barrier for the first time since the introduction of speed guns. Playing for Mumbai Indians in their Women's Premier League (WPL) match against Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, Ismail shattered the record by clocking 132.1km/h (82.08mph), her thunderbolt smashing into the pad of former Australia captain Meg Lanning.*—PTI*

GG defeat RCB to secure season's maiden win in WPL

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Laura Wolvaardt and skipper Beth Mooney struck attacking fifties as Gujarat Giants notched up a 19-run win against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League here on Wednesday.

Opting to bat, Gujarat Giants got off to a splendid start with Mooney (85 not out) and Wolvaardt (76) putting together 140 runs for the opening wicket. There was some batting collapse but Mooney stood firm as Gujarat posted 199/5.Royal Challengers Bangalore looked out of sorts and was restricted to 180/7.

It was the first win of the season for Gujarat. Smriti Mandhana (24) and Sabbhineni Meghana (4) got out inside seven overs and their No. 6 batter Georgia Wareham provided some late fireworks in her 22-ball 48 but it proved insufficient.

Laura Wolvaardt and Beth Mooney *PHOTO: PTI*

Brief Scores:

Gujarat Giants Women 199/5; 20 overs (Laura Wolvaardt 76, Beth Mooney 85 not out) beat Royal Challengers Bangalore Women 180/8; 20 overs (Georgia Wareham 48; Ashleigh Gardner 2/23) by 19 runs.

—PTI

Shanto helps Bangladesh level series

SYLHET, 6 MARCH

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto's half-century helped Bangladesh level the series against Sri Lanka as the hosts completed a comfortable win in the second T20I in Sylhet. The visitors faltered in the middle overs with the bat before Bangladesh's top four got all the runs.The game was not without controversy though. Soumya Sarkar's not-out decision during the chase left Sri Lanka fuming after the third umpire ruled that there was a clear gap between bat and ball, even though Ultra-edge showed a clear spike.When Sri Lanka was put into bat for the second game in a row, Kamindu Mendis and Kusal Mendis took charge of the Sri Lanka innings from the fourth over after Taskin Ahmed removed Avishka Fernando for a duck. Bangladesh 170 for 2 (Shanto 53*, Litton 36, Pathirana 2-28) beat Sri Lanka 165 for 5 (Mendis 37, Mendis 36, Soumya 1-5) by eight wickets. *—AP*

Harry Kane steers Bayern into the Champions League q/fs

MUNICH, 6 MARCH

Harry Kane scored twice to steer Bayern Munich into the quarterfinals of the Champions League with a 3-0 win over Lazio on Tuesday.

Kane's 32nd and 33rd goals this season for Bayern ensured the Bavarian powerhouse recovered from losing the first leg of the last 16 tie 1-0 in Rome to win 3-1 on aggregate over two legs.

"A perfect night for us," said Kane, the man of the match.

The win will ease the pressure on Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel, whose premature departure at the end of the season was announced by Bayern after the team's three-game losing run — including the defeat in Rome.

Englishman Harry Kane scores a goal against Lazio in the UCL second leg. *PHOTO: AFP*

Bayern's new sporting director Max Eberl said before Tuesday's game that Tuchel would remain in charge afterward even if the team lost, but there had been a feeling defeat would bring forward the coach's exit. *—AP*

Kidambi Srikanth *PHOTO: AFP*

French Open: Kidambi Srikanth stuns Chen

BEIJING, 6 MARCH

India's Kidambi Srikanth progressed to the men's singles second round with a stunning win over Chinese Taipei's Chou Tien Chen but HS Prannoy fell short of making an early exit from the French Open Super 750 badminton tournament in Paris on Wednesday. The world No. 24 Srikanth, who is racing against time to qualify for the Paris Olympics, outwitted 14th-ranked Chen 21-15, 20-22, 21-8 in a 66-minute opening-round clash for his third win over the Taiwanese shuttler in seven meetings.

In the next round, the 2021 world championships silver medallist Srikanth will fight it out against China's world No. 17 Lu Guang Zu, who ended the campaign of India's HS Prannoy with a fine 21-17, 21-17 win at the adjacent court at the Arena Porte de la Chapelle here.

Srikanth was by far the better player as he roared back from 5-7 behind, winning 14 of the next 17 points to earn the bragging rights.

However, Chen produced a rearguard in the second game and managed to keep his nose ahead in time to take the match to the decider after a grueling battle of nerves.

After the change of sides, Srikanth was back in his element as from 7-5, the Indian pocketed nine straight points to leave Chen far behind. The Taiwanese managed three points before the Indian banged the door on his face with the remaining five points.

In the adjacent court, Prannoy seemed on the road to glory only to falter in the end as Guang Zu stole the show.

Prannoy moved to a 5-2 lead early in the opening game and though Guang Zu clawed back with three points, the Indian quickly changed gears to reestablish a three-point advantage at the break. *—AP*

EIndian GMs (L-R) Pentala Harikrishna, R Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi and Vidit Gujrathi pose for group photos during the presentation ceremony of the Men's Chess Team event at the 19th Asian Games *PHOTO: AFP*

Gukesh escapes with a draw against Praggu

HANGZHOU, 6 MARCH

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa failed to register a win from an advantageous position against compatriot D Gukesh as their seventh-round match ended in a draw in the Prague Masters Chess tournament here on Wednesday.

Praggnandhaa came very close to beating Gukesh who played black but in the end, they split points.It was an Italian opening yet again and Praggnanandhaa showed his ability to push for more from a level middle game that arose.

Gukesh fell under pressure on the queenside and lost a couple of pawns in the ensuing queen and rook endgame.

Not losing heart, Gukesh fought on relentlessly and Praggnanandhaa faltered as he missed a winning maneuver on the 37th move. Gukesh still had a herculean task on hand but he managed to split the points after 91 moves.On what turned out to be another interesting day, Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattarov stayed ahead of the field after defeating Vincent Keymer of Germany. It was a quick recovery for the Uzbek after a rather painful loss in the previous round against Praggna nandhaa. *—AP*

MITROVIC SCORES FOR AL-HILAL IN 2-0 WIN OVER AL-ITTIHAD

RIYADH, 6 MAR

Aleksandar Mitrovic and Salem Al-Dawsari scored for Al-Hilal in a 2-0 win over Al-Ittihad, which saw midfielder N'Golo Kanté sent off in the first leg of their Asian Champions League quarterfinal match Tuesday.Mitrovic converted a penalty six minutes before the break to become joint-top scorer in the tournament with eight goals. Three minutes later, Al-Dawsari doubled the lead in the all-Saudi Arabian matchup. Kanté was dismissed in the 66th minute for a dangerous tackle on former Chelsea teammate Kalidou Koulibaly. Kante will miss the second leg in Jeddah next Tuesday. *—AP*

Nishant Dev *PHOTO: AFP*

Indian boxer Nishant makes winning start

BUSTO ARSIZIO, 6 MARCH

World Championships bronze medallist Nishant Dev gave India its first win at the 1st World Olympic Boxing Qualifier, defeating Britain's Lewis Richardson by a 3-1 split decision in the men's 71kg category here.

Nishant was aggressive right from the word go against the 2022 Commonwealth Games bronze medallist and won the first round of his bout 4-1 on Tuesday.

The 23-year-old Indian became even more dominant in the second round using his long reach and delivered some effective right hooks to comfortably win 5-0.

He put forward a controlled performance in the third round as well and avoided multiple attacks from his opponent while trying to protect his lead and ultimately won the round of 64 bout by a split decision.

Six-time Asian Championships medallist Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), suffered a first-round loss via RSC to reigning World Champion Ruslan Abdullaev of Uzbekistan.

Living up to his reputation with his pinpointed punches, Abdullaev penetrated Thapa's defense multiple times which forced the Indian pugilist to go into defensive mode right from the start.

However, the defensive approach didn't last long as Abdullaev continued his onslaught, landing powerful punches. Thapa received two standing counts within 20 seconds before the referee stopped the contest. *—AP*

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTERFINALS

Mbappé scores twice as PSG gets past Real Sociedad

SAN SEBASTIAN, 6 MARCH

Kylian Mbappé led Paris Saint-Germain back to the Champions League quarterfinals on Tuesday, scoring both goals in a 2-1 win over Real Sociedad that kept alive the French club's hopes of winning the European title in its last season with the France forward.

PSG advanced 4-1 on aggregate, with Mbappé also scoring one of the goals in the 2-0 win in the first leg in Paris three weeks ago. Mbappé has already told PSG he will not stay with the club after this season.

Despite huge spending to try to win the Champions League for the first time, PSG had been eliminated from the last 16 five times in the last seven seasons, including the last two. It made it to the semifinals in 2021 and was runner-up in 2020."We knew right away that we couldn't go to sleep," Mbappé said. "If they had opened the scoring, they would have pushed on with their fans' backing. We had to dampen their hopes early on. That's what we did, and we're very happy to be back in the quarterfinals."

Kylian Mbappe of Paris Saint-Germain celebrates scoring his team's second goal. *PHOTO: AFP*

- Kylian Mbappé led Paris Saint-Germain back to the Champions League quarterfinals on Tuesday, scoring both goals in a 2-1 win over Real Sociedad that kept alive the French club's hopes of winning the European title

Mbappé was the difference-maker again on Tuesday, opening the scoring with a beautiful goal in the 15th minute after a couple of nifty moves inside the area to cut back from near the touchline and fire a firm right-footed shot into the far corner. The shot broke the netting by the far post, prompting a short stoppage in play so it could be fixed.

Mbappé's second goal came in the 56th with a run that started from near the midfield line. He sped to the open space to collect a long pass by Lee Kang-in and calmly found the net from inside the area.

At 25 years and 76 days, Mbappé became the second-youngest player to reach 45 Champions League goals, from the group stage to the final. Lionel Messi reached that mark at 24 years and 257 days. Mbappé stands at 46 goals.

Mbappé hadn't scored in his last two appearances with PSG but had eight goals in his last eight matches with the club. He had been replaced in the last two matches but played through the final whistle on Tuesday.

PSG had won 10 of its last 13 matches in all competitions but was coming off consecutive draws against Rennes and Monaco in the French league. *—AP*